



REX·KINGDON  
AT  
WALCOTT·HALL

• GORDON BRADDOCK •



John C Shaw III

from

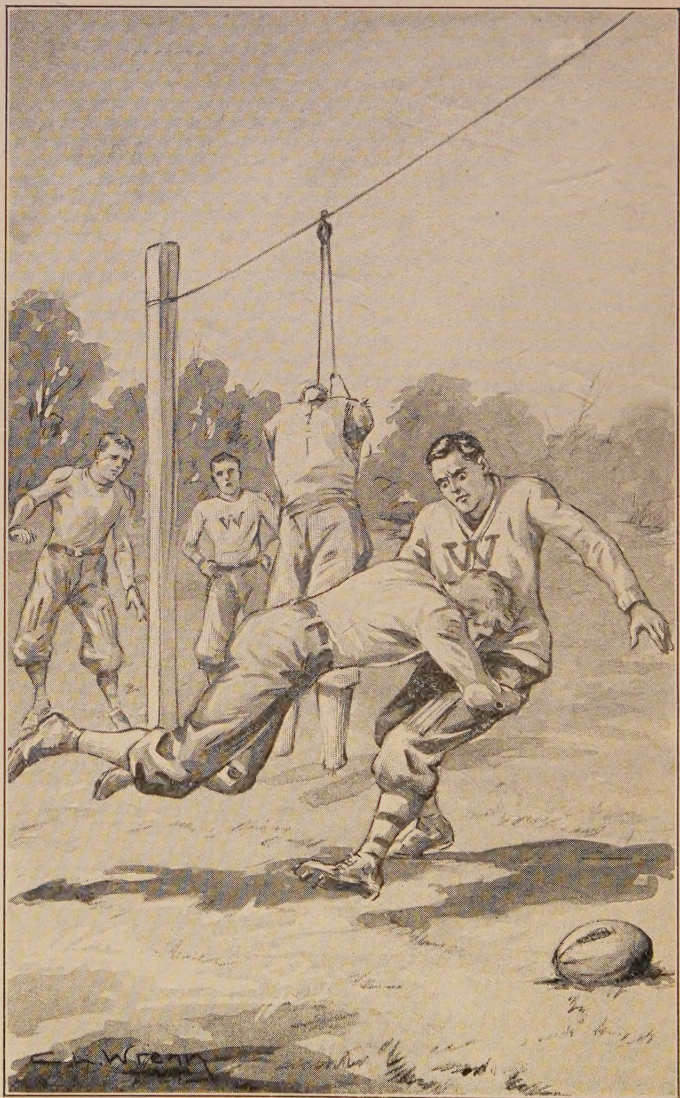
John Knowles

Christmas 1924









Rex's momentum was considerable, and Hornbrook, caught unprepared, made no resistance.—Page 143.

# REX KINGDON AT WALCOTT HALL

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By GORDON BRADDOCK

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AUTHOR OF

"Rex Kingdon of Ridgewood High," "Rex Kingdon in the  
North Woods," "Rex Kingdon Behind the Bat,"  
"Rex Kingdon on Storm Island," etc.



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## AUTHOR'S FOREWORD.

"Quick action!" That is the motto of the modern American boy. It speaks the spirit of the times, and the boy who succeeds must become imbued with that spirit. Idlers, drones, dullards and slow-thinkers are heavily handicapped, and it is becoming more and more necessary for every one who wishes to succeed in any line of endeavor to keep awake and hustling all the time. In *Rex Kingdon* I have tried to depict a typically up-to-the-minute modern boy who makes a practice of using his head under all conditions.

Under many trying circumstances he demonstrated his resourcefulness, courage and ready wit in "*Rex Kingdon of Ridgewood High*" and in "*Rex Kingdon in the North Woods*," the first two volumes of *THE TWENTIETH CENTURY BOYS' SERIES*, and in the book you now have in hand he is called upon to hold his own against a set of clever chaps who regard themselves as far superior in almost every way to the average

boy who comes to Walcott Hall. They are led by Wash Hornbrook, a youth of unusual ability, great egotism and haughty intolerance of those who oppose him in anything. Hornbrook considers himself a clever joker, and it is with keen delight that he plans to make Kingdon a butt of ridicule, believing the mild-mannered, shy-appearing freshman will fall an easy victim. But Rex has a wit even more nimble than Hornbrook's, and when he turns the tables, to the utter confusion of the autocrat of Walcott Hall, the enmity between them begins. This runs its course during the opening term of the school, and reaches its climax in the great football game with Winchester, when loyalty and true manhood triumph. And from the opening paragraph to the concluding sentence I have endeavored to make the story move with that "quick action" which appeals to every live boy.

However, in life, as in war, the winning of a single battle early in the campaign seldom decides the issue. Other battles must be fought, other victories won; and the campaign at Walcott Hall was merely inaugurated with these opening maneuvers. In "Rex Kingdon Behind the Bat," the succeeding book of the series, Rex will be

found still in the midst of the struggle, and beset by temptations as well as by personal enemies; for he, like others, is called upon to learn the valuable lesson that self-mastery is the greatest triumph, and that oftentimes one's most dangerous foe lies ambushed in his own heart.

Sincerely yours,

GORDON BRADDOCK.

"Overocks," Camden, Maine,

January 9, 1915.





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# Rex Kingdon at Walcott Hall.

## CHAPTER I.

### BOISTEROUS YOUTHS.

Again the old gentleman in the middle of the car thumped the floor fiercely with his stick.

"This foolery has got to stop!" he exclaimed, glaring angrily around. "Do you hear, you young hoodlums? I've stood all of it I'm going to. You settle down and behave like human beings, or I'll call the conductor to make you."

A sudden hush followed his words. Then the group of boys at the rear of the car broke into half-smothered snickers, which were quelled by the upraised hand of a lad of seventeen or thereabouts, who stepped out of the throng and deliberately approached the elderly complainant. He was a handsome chap, slim, well-set-up, with intensely black hair and eyes, and an immaculate perfection of dress and person that seemed almost finicky. When he paused beside the old

gentleman's seat, his mobile face was set in an expression of grieved surprise.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said in a low, well-modulated voice, "but is it possible you were referring just now—to us?"

"I certainly was," replied the owner of the cane, whose patience had evidently been sorely tried. "Who else has been making a disturbance, may I ask?"

"But, sir," murmured the youth in a tone of gentle protest, "hoodlums is a bit—er—harsh, don't you think? We were only——"

"You are making intolerable nuisances of yourselves in a public railroad coach," cut in the old gentleman tartly. "You may be schoolboys, but you're old enough to behave yourselves with common decency. Unless you cease this abominable horseplay, I shall make a complaint to the conductor."

"Oh, sir," pleaded the boy in a shocked tone, "you won't have to do that! If we had the least idea that it might annoy you, we'd never even spoken above a whisper."

Suspiciously the old gentleman searched the speaker's face, but could find nothing save re-



gret in the candid dark eyes. Nevertheless, he did not allow himself to relent.

"Humph!" he grunted. "You paid precious little attention to my first protest."

"Oh, I assure you we thought you were merely jesting. We didn't fancy for a moment that you were in earnest. If we even dreamed you were serious, we would have become as decorous as people at service in church. I think I may promise you that there'll be no further cause for complaint, sir, during the remainder of your journey. I hope you'll accept the apology of my humble self and the humbler members of——"

"That will do!" snapped the old man, detecting the note of banter under the boy's elaborate humility. "I don't want your apologies, but I do mean to finish my trip in peace and quiet. If you interfere with it again, you know what to expect."

"I assure you, sir, you'll hardly know we're on the car."

As he turned away, the youth bowed with an exaggerated politeness that brought a snicker of delight from his watching comrades. Hearing it, the old gentleman flushed angrily. Then he caught the eye of a vigorous, square-jawed

man in the seat ahead, whose sample case proclaimed him a traveling salesman.

"A reform school is the place for such trash," grumbled the older man.

The drummer hunched his wide shoulders and raised a dissenting eyebrow. "That would be treating 'em a bit too seriously, don't you think?" he asked. "What they really need is a good tanning. They're nothing but a lot of half-baked cubs who think this sort of thing is funny. It's a wonder to me the guy who runs their school doesn't make 'em see what nuisances they make of themselves."

He was at no pains to lower his voice, and several of the boys at the end of the car scowled. The black-haired lad remained quite undisturbed, however, as if he had heard a compliment; in fact, his expression became, if possible, even more bland, and a smile curved the corners of his mouth. He seemed far less affected by the adverse comment than by an empty-faced young man whose appreciation of the youngsters' horse-play had been evidenced throughout the journey by frequent loud guffaws and approving remarks.

"Dried up fossil that can't see a joke!" said this amused individual as the boy came along the

aisle. "What you fellows done wouldn't hurt nobody providin' they had a little sportin' spirit to take it right. He makes me sick."

The slim chap paused and looked down on him, a curiously enigmatic expression in his dark eyes.

"I wouldn't be so hard on him if I were you," he murmured smoothly. "Some people are sensitive and can't help being easily upset, just as there are others, with skins like a rhino, who are always butting in where they're not wanted. Personally," he concluded sweetly, "I prefer the sensitive kind."

Crude as the boy had made it, the thrust came near being wasted. The young man looked blank at first, but, catching the expression in the lad's eyes, he flushed and relapsed into silence. Evidently satisfied with his performance, the youth passed on to where his companions greeted him with grins and chuckles of amusement.

"Great stuff, Wash," giggled Pewee Hicks, whose diminutive build and sharpness of intellect combined to bring him many concessions from the older boys. "I near croaked listening to you. Now, how are we going to rib 'em up a little?"

Wash Hornbrook surveyed Hicks with a stare which would have done credit to an infant in arms. "Rib 'em up?" he echoed in a tone of pained surprise. "Why, Pewee, didn't you hear me tell his nibs, old General Pepper, that we'd be so quiet he wouldn't know we were on the train? You shock me with your babble about ribbing them up—you really do. Who's got some gum?"

Several packages were produced, and from them Hornbrook helped himself impartially and with such a lavish hand that a protesting chorus arose.

"Oh, take it all," advised Chip Hatfield, slim, blond and mercurial. "Don't bother to leave any, Brook—it only weights down my clothes and spoils their shape, you know."

"I noticed a sagging in the left hand pocket," mumbled Hornbrook through the wad he was trying to masticate. "Shame to spoil that elegant fit. Everybody chew up! Since we're prohibited from making mirth, I'll have to entertain you with a little *sub rosa* conversation. Draw near and incline your ears. I must speak softly lest the repose of Uncle Pepper be disturbed."

Smiling broadly, they obeyed with the haste of



those who knew something diverting was in the wind. Hornbrook's voice was carefully pitched to prevent carrying beyond the circle, but what he had to say appeared to be uncommonly amusing. Grins widened and delighted chuckles, growing into even more raucous sounds of mirth, assailed the alert ears of the old gentleman ahead, making him glare suspiciously around several times. But presently the group of boys broke up. Pewee Hicks deposited himself, with a magazine, in the seat just behind the empty-faced young man. No one seemed inclined to advance any further in the car, and at last the old gentleman, feeling his suspicion to be unwarranted, settled down with a look of satisfied triumph.

But not for long. A sudden cry broke from one of the boys on the opposite side of the coach. Pointing out of the window, he shouted:

"Look—look there, everybody! A runaway! If he don't stop that horse, they'll be killed!"

Everybody sprang up and there was a general rush to that side of the car, the old gentleman joining in. Those who saw anything got a passing glimpse of a rawboned old horse, attached to a rattletrap wagon, jogging sleepily along a road that crossed the railway. The driver was

a gawky country boy, and beside him sat two grinning, bare-legged children. Only a glimpse, and the train swept on. The passengers, who had been hoaxed, muttered their disgust. The old gentleman shook his cane at the fellow who had uttered the false alarm.

"You ought to have a larruping, and I'd enjoy giving it to ye, you young blatherskite!" he raged, returning in renewed wrath to his seat.

Hornbrook, looking grave and concerned, was standing beside that seat. "You are quite right, major," he said in a sad and serious tone, as he bowed low to the irascible passenger. "I agree with you most heartily; a person who can't think of a better joke than that ought to face a firing squad. If you say so, I'll give him a real hard slap on the wrist."

"You go 'long about your business!" snapped the old gentleman, brandishing his stick, "or I'll give you something."

Hornbrook retired with as much dignity as he could command, rejoining his cronies. At intervals the boys continued to snicker and giggle in their end of the car, but they made no further attempt to put anything over, and after a time

the old gentleman decided that they had been suppressed.

"Guess I cooled 'em down at last," he reflected as the familiar outskirts of his home town began to gladden his eyes. "They didn't dare go no further with their tomfoolery."

He waited until the train was slowing down before he grasped his bag and made an attempt to rise. To his amazement, the seat held him fast. He seemed to be glued to it.

## CHAPTER II.

### ANOTHER VICTIM IN VIEW.

The old man uttered an astonished snort and wriggled ineffectively. From behind him came the sound of suppressed titters that stung him like a goad. His eyes snapping, his face an apoplectic hue, he strove to release himself by a strong, quick pull. Whatever was holding him to the seat, held fast. The laughter at the end of the car swelled in volume, causing the victim of the joke to quiver in an access of fury. Resolving to free himself at any cost, he dropped his bag and caught the back of the drummer's seat with both hands, dragging himself loose by sheer force.

Something gave way with the ominous sound of rending cloth, and the old gentleman did not need the aid of exploring fingers to tell him that a well-worn portion of his trousers was seriously damaged. Bereft of dignity and repression, he

whirled, snarling, on the grinning group of youthful tormentors at the end of the car, only to realize that the train had stopped and that, unless he wanted to be carried beyond his station, he would have no time for retaliation.

"Young scoundrels!" he frothed, shaking his fist. "You'll pay for this! I'll complain to your principal. I'll find out if he—Wait, conductor! Hold up there! Let me off!"

Snatching up his bag and cane, he rushed from the car. Behind him the crowd of boys burst into peals of laughter that rolled out through the open windows, causing even the station loafers to prick up their ears. On the platform, the old gentleman paused long enough to sputter furiously at the impatient conductor, but what he said must have been incoherent. When the train had started again, the official came in and stared grimly at the throng of boys for a moment or two before disappearing into the car ahead to take up tickets.

The husky young traveling man watched him go with a shrug of resignation. The puerile trick played on the old man had aroused his disgust, and he was tempted to take matters into his own hands and teach the boys a lesson. Then



he realized that he would cause himself a lot of trouble for someone he was unlikely ever to set eyes on again.

“Those blooming cubs ought to be turned up and spanked, every last one of ’em,” he muttered, “but I reckon it’s not up to yours truly to hand out the discipline. If they’d only try something on me——”

They seemed too wise to take that chance, however, and the drummer picked up his paper again. Presently, remembering something, he glanced curiously over the back of the seat. For an instant he gazed uncertainly at the grayish lumps imbedded in the plush surface, to which some shreds of the old man’s trousers likewise adhered. Then a look of comprehension flashed into his face.

“Gum!” he said under his breath. “Hanged if that slim chap didn’t drop the wads of the whole gang on the seat while the old man was looking for the runaway!—Oh, close up, you donkey! Cut out the braying!”

This last exhortation was addressed to the empty-faced young man several seats back, whose enjoyment of the jest surpassed that of its originators in intensity and duration. He had a nasal

haw-haw of great power and penetration, and when that finally subsided, he continued to chuckle at intervals in a manner irritating to the drummer. Apparently he was so diverted that the appearance of the next station took him by surprise. As the train stopped, he glanced out of the window, gave vent to an exclamation, dragged his suit case from under the seat, and dashed toward the door.

He had not taken three steps when the straps of the cheap straw affair snapped suddenly, the case flew open, and its contents were dumped into the aisle. Jaw sagging, the young man stared dazedly for a second at the mass. Dropping on his knees, he began to scramble the things hurriedly back into the two halves of the gaping piece of baggage. The drummer surveyed him with twinkling eyes that had already taken in the nature of the damage to the straps.

"Great little bunch of jokers, ain't they?" he murmured.

"How do you mean—jokers?" snapped the young man, stuffing in a last handful of garments and crowding both halves of the suit case together.

"Notice the neat way they cut the straps for

you," invited the drummer blandly. "Get on to yourself. For a chap with such a keen sense of humor, you're thick on this deal."

His face crimson, the youth scrambled to his feet, clutching the bulging suit case to his bosom. The train had already started again, but before making for the door, he cast a swift glance back to where a cluster of grinning boys watched delightedly his undignified exit. With a snarl singularly like the snarl of the elderly gentleman, he rushed out of the car and down the steps. A moment later he spread himself and his wardrobe over the station platform, to the delirious joy of the youthful passengers, who had hardly dared hope for this ludicrous culmination to their joke.

"Grand, Wash—simply superb!" chortled "Beauty" Kester, withdrawing his head at last from the window, and wiping his eyes. He had returned from a brief sojourn in the car ahead just in time to witness the sidesplitting dénouement. "I was in hopes you'd get that boob. That cackle of his jarred me."

"Awful hick," agreed Hornbrook languidly. "It was too easy to be much fun, though. Anything doing up in front?"

"Dead as a morgue. You'd think you were in a young ladies' seminary to see 'em sitting around with books and magazines. Oh, say, though, who do you think's in there?"

"Ask me. I always was a prize guesser—not!"

"Rex Kingdon."

Hornbrook's forehead crinkled in a puzzled way. "Kingdon?" he repeated. "Rex King—— You can't mean that little Willie Wonderworker Red Phillips exhumed in the Maine backwoods this summer—the guy that was such a shark at football, baseball, and about every other blooming sport and pastime ever invented? You can't possibly mean him, Beauty?"

"Why can't I?" countered Kester, thrusting forth a lower jaw that formed the chief item of a collection of surpassingly homely features. "Huh?"

"Because I've been through the train, and there's nobody aboard who answers the description of Larry's marvel."

"That's where you slipped a cog," asserted Kester. "He doesn't happen to look the part at all. He's on the right, about the middle of the next car—nice blue eyes and a bunch of curly

yellow hair that makes you think of a choir boy."

"*That* blond duck?" ejaculated Hornbrook incredulously. "Oh, never, Venus! He might put up a fair game of croquet or tiddledywinks, but as for being a gridiron champion—— Come again, old man! Somebody's been stringing you."

"Nothing like it," retorted Kester. "His name is Kingdon, and he's from Maine, all right. I talked to him myself, and he sure is from the backwoods. I'll bet Red was horsing you when he said the dub was such an athlete."

Hornbrook smiled in a superior fashion. "When did you ever know Red Phillips to horse me, Beaut?" he drawled. "Likely it was the other way around. Anybody with a ten-ounce brain can put it over Old Larry. I'll bet this——"

He paused abruptly, and frowned thoughtfully at the floor. Presently the volatile Hicks, who was hovering near with several others, began to grow restless.

"Well?" he queried. "As you were saying?"

"Don't bother me, Runt; I'm thinking."

"Gracious!" chirped Pewee. "Do let me watch you. Does it hurt much?"

Hornbrook merely reached over, caught the small boy by the nape of the neck, and laid him



irresistibly, face downward, over his own knees. "You're so blame green, infant," he remarked, "that some day you'll fall in the salad and be mistaken for lettuce." He straightened suddenly, his face brightening. "That's the idea! I'll put up a joke on that simp in there that'll scare him out of a year's growth."

Taking advantage of the relaxing pressure, Hicks wriggled out of the older lad's grasp, and bounced up. "Great stuff!" he approved. "What are you going to do, Wash—give him the third degree? You could, easy enough, with not a master on the train."

Hornbrook raised his expressive eyebrows. "Sometimes I wonder at you, Pewee," he murmured. "Occasionally you show gleams of sense, but nothing so crude as that goes here. My idea's a lot more subtle—more *recherché*, so to speak."

"Snakes alive!" gurgled "Splinter" Benkard, who tipped the scales close on two hundred. "Rechurchy? Hear him rave!"

"I thought you'd taken a correspondence course in Choctaw, Skinny," retorted Hornbrook suavely, "or I'd never have been guilty of such a break. Hold your breath until I get my plan in action."

"Aren't you going to tell us what it is now?" came in a disappointed wail.

"And ruin the effect? Oh, never!! You fellows drift into the other car and get orchestra seats. The curtain will go up in two shakes. Don't everybody rush in at once and put him wise that something's up. Stroll in one or two at a time, and settle down. Then, when I show up, for Pete's sake don't any of you recognize me or call me by name. Pretend I'm a stranger, and tell the other fellows to do the same. Pike along, and let's start things."

They departed, crowding the aisle and vigorously disputing as to who should have first place. Hornbrook watched them for a few moments before rising and stepping to the narrow mirror set in the end of the car. His movements were so peculiar that they at once aroused the curiosity of one or two passengers who happened to observe him. His first act was to disarrange the immaculate perfection of his sleek black hair, running his fingers through it and dragging a lock or two down over his face in wild disorder. Laying hold of the beautifully tied scarf, he jerked it awry, after which he yanked open the two top buttons of his vest. That done, he stared

fixedly at his reflection in the glass and proceeded to go through a series of facial contortions which were, to say the least, rather startling. However, this seemed to give him no little satisfaction, for he was smiling when he turned away.

"I guess I can put it over," he murmured, picking up a felt hat belonging to one of the other boys and slapping it carelessly on his head. "I'll slip out at the next station and beat it up front, so he won't think I belong to the rest of the bunch. If I don't throw a scare into that simp, I'll eat this lovely felt confection of Benkard's."

## CHAPTER III.

### CLEVER ACTING.

Being the best afternoon train running between Boston and Scarsdale, it held the usual crowd of students returning to Walcott Hall after the long vacation. There were boys of every description—young and old, big and little, athletic and studious. There was to be seen the stalwart sixth-former of seventeen or more, starting on his last year at prep. school and feeling very much the man indeed; also the awed youngster of twelve who had never been away from home before, and was not quite certain whether the experience would prove pleasant or the reverse.

Most of the new boys were in the forward portion of the train, where likewise were to be found some older fellows who lacked interest in the crowd of jesters that had taken possession of the rear car. Not especially noticeable was a blond lad who sat by the window near the middle of the

car. He was neither tall nor powerful, but he had the trim and compact build one usually associates with mental and physical alertness. His features were clean-cut; his clean brown skin was tinged by the ruddy glow of health. He had wide-set, level blue eyes.

Strangers, however, were apt to be misled by the mop of curly golden hair and the seraphic expression Rex Kingdon could assume. It diverted him to deceive certain individuals and send them off with a totally wrong idea of his personality. Beauty Kester had been misled. His object in accosting the new boy was, apparently, to size up his athletic possibilities; and the temptation to fool him proved irresistible. For Kester's benefit, Rex had played the country greenhorn to perfection. Rex chuckled as he recalled the expression of undisguised disgust that overspread the homely chap's features while he listened to Kingdon's naïve questions and comments on the subject of football.

"He set me down for a dead loss," thought the new boy, with a grin. "Wonder if he's one of Larry's chums. I wish Old Red were here to put me wise to this crowd."

He was still thinking of Phillips, who lived near



New York, and wondering whether he should find him at the school, when his attention was suddenly attracted by a person entering the car at the forward door. A young fellow, not much older than Kingdon himself, his clothes well cut but slouchily worn, and his whole appearance superficially untidy, moved swiftly and silently down the aisle, his head slightly bent, darting quick glances from side to side in an oddly furtive manner that puzzled Rex and drew the attention of others. But, though many of the passengers surveyed him curiously as he passed, even turning to stare after him, no one seemed to know the newcomer.

With that same curious tread—swift yet with now and then a touch of halting indecision—the stranger approached Kingdon's seat and passed on. Rex caught a momentary sidelong glance from glinting black eyes and yielded to the impulse to look after him. He had no more than half-turned his head, however, when the young man returning slid into the seat beside him.

"This seat taken?" he asked in a curt undertone.

Rex shook his head. "Nope. Help yourself."

"I was hoping it wouldn't be," said the

stranger, removing his hat and fixing his eyes on a spot on the seat-back straight ahead of him. "I liked your looks at once."

Kingdon raised his eyebrows. "You're awful flattering."

"It's not flattery, it's fact," stated the other coldly. He had a trick of running his fingers through his thick black hair, and drawing them on down the side of his face until they rested indecisively against his chin. "I was looking for someone I could trust, and you seem like that sort of person. I'm the Prince of Wales, you know, but you needn't kiss my hand. I'm traveling incognito."

The words were uttered in a tone of perfect seriousness and made Rex start slightly and glance sharply at his seatmate, to meet one of those queer sidelong glances. In a moment the fellow's gaze was averted again, but, brief as it had been, that glance left Kingdon with a distinct impression of wide, dilated eyes, inky black, and filled with an underlying expression that was close to wildness.

His own eyes narrowed just a bit, and his gaze shifted across the aisle. Then it swept swiftly over the faces of his fellow travelers, perhaps

judging what chances he would have of aid in case the youth beside him grew violent. Suddenly his expression grew blank and unreadable as he turned back to his surprising seatmate.

"How interesting!" he murmured naïvely. "I never met a prince before. Should I call you—er—your highness? or don't you want even that?"

Though superficially composed, his voice held more than a touch of shakiness. The black-haired chap totally ignored the question. After staring straight ahead of him in that queer, uncanny fashion for a full minute, he burst out impetuously:

"If it wasn't for the butterflies, I wouldn't mind; but I never could abide the beastly things!"

"Butterflies?" gasped Kingdon blankly.

"That's what I said!" snapped the other. "Hard of hearing?"

"No; but I don't see——"

"Don't tell me you can't see them!" interrupted the stranger, with a furtive, sweeping glance above his head. "Don't lie! Look! Dozens of 'em fluttering around—yellow and black, with black eyes that stare at you and never wink. Ugh! How I hate 'em!" His lowered voice took on a

quivering accent of loathing. "If I were only back home, I could fix 'em——"

He broke off, shivering, and straightened with what seemed an obvious effort to thrust the unpleasant topic from his mind. He was at no pains to prevent the near-by passengers from hearing what he said. Rex could see that those occupying neighboring seats, particularly the boys bound for Walcott Hall, were following the conversation with keen interest.

"I beg pardon for being so emphatic," resumed the black-haired chap, in a conversational tone, "but the beastly things get on my nerves and make me forget my manners. Here I've been talking to you for ten minutes or so, and haven't introduced myself. I'm the Rajah of Singapore on an inspection tour of this country. You needn't salaam, however. I'm traveling incog., and——"

"But I thought you were the Prince of Wales!" interrupted Kingdon, in a tone of bewilderment.

The other glared at him. "Prince of Wales!" he growled. "What gave you that notion, I'd like to know?"

"You said——"

"Don't tell me I said such an absurd thing!" was the tart retort. "I'm perfectly able to re-

member what I say, without the help of you or anybody else." Out of the narrowed eye-slits he darted a glance of extreme irritation at Kingdon. "Do you know, my friend," he went on coldly, "this sort of talk isn't going to add to my favorable opinion of you. When I sat down I sized you up as a person of cleverness and parts. You still have that appearance, but you certainly don't act as if you had a superabundance of brains. When I state that I am the Khedive of Egypt, for reasons of state traveling incognito, I don't expect to have people insist I've been passing myself off for someone else. Anything more in that line is going to cause unpleasantness. Get me?"

Staring at him in open amazement, Kingdon suddenly caught his breath and started to speak. But swiftly his parted lips shut, and something like a tremor shook him.

"Oh, yes," he nodded, taking out a handkerchief and mopping his forehead. "I shouldn't have said that, of course. I'd never have become so mixed up if I'd been well. It's the trouble and worry of feeling as I do that——"

"Apologies accepted," cut in the stranger, swiftly shifting to the amicable. "I'm never one to harbor hard feelings. See here." He lowered



his voice and glanced cautiously around. "Have you noticed a tall, thin chap on the train, with red hair and a squint in his left eye? You haven't? Well, he'll come through before long." The fellow's voice betrayed conviction. "When he appears, I don't want you to notice him or anything I do. If I should hide under the seat, don't act as if you thought it strange. Of course, eventually, I'll have to kill him, but——"

"Kill him!" gulped the listener, in a tone of horror.

The black eyes flashed on Kingdon a momentary glance full of hard cruelty and determination. "Precisely," was the reply, in a voice of gloating. "If he had a dozen lives, I'd taken them all to pay up for the crimes he has committed against me and mine. The very knife that will soon settle his hash is in my pocket."

"But what——"

"Listen, I'll tell you."

His voice was cold and menacing. With a sudden movement, he thrust one hand into his hip pocket, pressing closer to Kingdon. With a shudder, the latter tried to escape such close proximity. For a moment he stared wildly around, as

if meditating a leap over the seat-back. Then, casting a nervous glance at his companion, he succumbed to the inevitable, and settled back helplessly.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE BOY WHO TOOK HIS MEDICINE.

"It's a vile plot against me," the youth explained, in a tense, jerky undertone. "They want to keep me from my rights. I told you a moment ago that I was the Crown Prince of Albia. By the way, you must keep that a secret, not another human being in this country knows it. This scoundrel is my half brother, Paul, who hopes, by putting me away, to gain the throne. You see the point of their rascally scheme, of course? Absurd as it is, they try and make out that I'm insane and, therefore, not capable of ruling. Paul has even gone so far as to pretend he's my keeper, but of course that's the most arrant sort of nonsense. I'm as sane as you, or that man in front, or anybody in the car."

He paused abruptly and stared at Kingdon with keen, piercing scrutiny. When the blond lad made no comment, he scowled.

"Well?" he snapped harshly. "You agree with me, don't you?"

"Yes, yes, of course!" stammered Rex hastily. "I didn't know you expected me to answer. I'm not feeling very well, you know. I'm not up to par at all. Absurd, of course. Naturally you couldn't be insane—a person of your extraordinary mental powers. You seem to see through any scheme at once. How has he tried to—er—prove such a thing?"

"Bribes!" hissed the black-haired chap, rolling his eyes impressively. "He has access to the treasury, and everybody can be influenced by gold. They've actually agreed to send me to an asylum. In fact, I'm on my way there now, and they believe I'm going quietly. I let them think it." He laughed in a manner far from pleasant. "It does no harm. When the time comes, they'll find out what fools they've been to persecute the Archduke of Bosnia with their dirty schemes. Here! You're not going? I can't allow this at all. I can't permit——"

"It's only to get a glass of water," explained Kingdon hastily. "I've got to take my medicine regularly—the doctor insisted on that. It's time

now. I'll just go down to the cooler for a glass of water, and then come back."

"And betray me to the crowd that wants to put me away!" grated the wild-eyed fellow beside him. "Nothing like that! You can't put it over." Turning and catching the eye of a chubby-faced lad in the opposite seat, he raised an imperious finger. "Boy, one moment! Kindly bring a glass of water for this person."

At first the lad hesitated. Then, with a strange expression which was almost a facial contortion, he slowly rose and walked forward to the cooler. The moment his back was turned, his shoulders might have been observed to shake slightly. Just behind the seat that the chubby-faced chap had occupied, Pewee Hicks dug a skinny elbow into Chip Hatfield's ribs, and hunched closer to him.

"Great, ain't he?" he chuckled joyously. "Ever see anything like that take-off? He's got Blondie gasping for breath."

"I reckon so," agreed Hatfield. "But what's this sick talk the freshie's getting off? Wonder if there really is anything the matter with him?"

"Naw! He's scart, that's all," explained Pewee out of the depths of a vast experience. "He thought maybe he'd get away by that old stunt.

Take it from me, Chip, he's pea-green with fright. In about two shakes he'll blow up. Listen to Wash now."

Still wild-eyed, and scowling diabolically, Hornbrook was bending a dark and threatening glance upon his seat-mate.

"A traitor!" he muttered, as if to himself. "If I were only sure—— Stop! Keep your hands out of that bag! How do I know there isn't a bomb in it?"

"I'm only after my medicine," explained Kingdon plaintively. "I've got to take it regularly. The doctor said if I didn't——"

"Well, take it, then, and stop whining!" snapped the other irritatedly. "I'm afraid I've been deceived," he went on coldly, as Kingdon opened his bag and fumbled in it. "You're not the sort of person I took you to be." He fixed Rex with an accusing stare. "When did you first meet that scoundrelly half-brother of mine?"

Kingdon let his bag drop back to the floor, and looked at Hornbrook in an odd manner. "I never met him," he denied. "Has he eyebrows like yours?"

"Eyebrows?" rasped the other. "What——"

"They're such nice eyebrows," explained King-



don apologetically. "Especially the left one. I'm always keen about black eyebrows, and—— Oh, here's the water at last! Thank you so much! I'll take the medicine right away. I'm feeling so much worse, I'm afraid it's not doing all the good it should."

By this time nearly every person in the car was openly or surreptitiously watching the two with interest and curiosity that increased with each passing moment. Most of the boys were chuckling inwardly at the excellence of Hornbrook's acting. Apparently controlled by the delusions of a demented person, he was wild enough in manner, yet not too wild. His talk was sufficiently extravagant, yet it held that touch of sanity which is apparent at times in the most hopeless maniac. As Pewee Hicks had expressed it, he evidently had the new boy "scared to death," and the spectators waited gleefully for the enthralling climax they felt sure was approaching.

There were a few, however, like Chip Hatfield, who were puzzled by Kingdon's talk of illness, and unable to decide whether it was genuine or not. The fellow's manner seemed too natural to be faked; his expression and gestures were almost too real to be put on.

Having taken the water from the round-faced lad, Rex swiftly thrust into his mouth what might have been a large capsule, and tilted the glass. But, oddly enough, he did not swallow. The curious watchers saw his eyes widen and a look of horror come into them. He choked, his face flushed, his throat worked spasmodically, and one hand crept up as if to loosen his collar. He lowered the glass and slowly turned a stricken face on Hornbrook.

"I can't—swallow!" he choked in a queer voice.

His expression was so strained, so full of gripping terror, that Wash stared at him for an instant in very normal consternation before remembering the part he was playing.

"Don't try, then," he retorted callously. "What do you care whether you can swallow or not? As soon as you're used to it, you'll get along just as well without."

"But that's one of the—symptoms," gurgled Kingdon, with widening eyes. "They can't drink! They can't touch water! I—don't know what to do! The doctor said if I took this medicine regularly I could go without the Pasteur treatment, but I——"

"What!" gasped Hornbrook, in consternation.

"Pasteur treatment! You don't mean—*hydrophobia*?"

Kingdon nodded. Having returned the glass of water to the boy, who lingered, fascinated, in the aisle, he sat in a strained, rigid position, the fingers in one hand clutching the other sleeve.

"Three weeks ago," he said, in a shaking voice, "a dog with the rabies——" He broke off, pulled up his sleeve, and thrust a well-developed forearm toward his seat-mate. "There. You can see the mark still; it's all inflamed."

His lips twitching, he jerked down the sleeve and lapsed into momentary silence. Hornbrook felt his body trembling, and a sudden impulse to get away assailed the jester of Walcott Hall. He had not bargained for this. Illness of almost any sort always got on his nerves, and the mere thought of hydrophobia chilled his blood. Besides, there might be actual danger in the situation. Cautiously edging toward the outer end of the seat, he was on the point of making a hasty departure, when a startling thing happened. Without warning, the blond lad seized him roughly, and, with an amazing display of strength and dexterity, fairly flung him over beside the window.

"I can't sit there," he said jerkily. "It makes me dizzy to see things chasing past. I don't believe that doctor knew what he was talking about. I don't believe his medicine is worth a hang. Does my face look queer? I feel like the mischief, and I'm getting—getting wu—worse—every minute."

The words seemed to be choked off in his throat, and for a second or two he sat struggling in the grip of some sort of spasm. Then, to Hornbrook's horror, his lips curled at the side, showing his teeth, and there burst from him a snarl, unmistakably canine in quality. It was followed by another and another. Finally, with a hideous coughing bark, the boy subsided limply against the cushioned seat.

"The doctor was wrong!" he groaned. "I don't know what I'll do! It's simply awful!"

"In my opinion, it's all nonsense," said Hornbrook, with an attempt at bluster, which was not altogether successful. His companion's limpness and apparent state of collapse had heartened him a little, and led him to make an effort to escape from his uncomfortable position. "I don't believe there's any such thing as hydrophobia. It's all imagination. Now, if you——"

He caught his breath with a sudden hissing in-

take. Kingdon had slowly turned his face and, for the first time, Hornbrook saw that his companion's lips were flecked with white froth. There was no mistaking it, the thing was no figment of the imagination. The fellows across the way had seen it. Wash was perfectly aware of their alarmed expressions and tense, startled attitudes. The round-faced boy, who had lingered with the glass of water, suddenly decided that the glass should be returned without delay, and scuttled off. Everyone had a better chance to get away than himself, thought Hornbrook bitterly. He was sorry, now, that he had not let this fool freshman alone.

"Imagination!" snarled the latter, roused to sudden anger. "That's what you think, is it? Are my feelings all imagination? Is this imagination?" His hand swept the foam from his lips, but instantly more appeared, oozing from between his clenched teeth.

"I wish it was imagination," moaned Kingdon. "Did you ever see a person with the rabies? They go clean off their nut, and are just as liable to bite their best friend as——"

Again came that choking spasm, ending this time in actual barks that froze the blood in Horn-

brook's veins. With his eyes closed, Wash would have mistaken those sounds for the barking of a dog. He shrank close to the window, trying to make himself as small as possible.

"Don't be scared," gasped Kingdon between his paroxysms. "I'm all right. Won't hurt you if I can help it. They say a person doesn't know, though. If I should go for you, beat it. Least little scratch is dangerous. Don't know but you'd better go now. 'There's that eyebrow—that left eyebrow!" His hands clenched and his foam-flecked lips twitched. "I could bite that eyebrow! I'd like to bite it! Silly, isn't it? But somehow I feel that I shall have to do it in about half a minute."

He bent toward his seat-mate with a terrible leer, his lips curling back from his teeth. To Hornbrook, it was the last straw. His poise and self-control vanished. Gripped by an uncontrollable impulse to get away instantly and at any cost, he sprang to his feet, seized the back of the forward seat with both hands, and vaulted it as he would a rail fence. But he caught his toe and went crashing to the floor between the two seats.



## CHAPTER V.

### THE CLAN OF MOMUS.

Hornbrook was not hurt. In a twinkling he scrambled up, and leaped into the aisle. For a space, thankfulness at his escape more than compensated for the ridiculous manner in which it had been accomplished. He did not even mind the shout of laughter that swept the car from end to end. The crowd would be in no laughing humor when they fully understood the gravity of the situation. He looked around, frowning in annoyance over the childish behavior of his satellites. Then an expression of dazed bewilderment crept over his face.

He had supposed the laughter to be caused by his own absurd catapulting of the seats, and he believed the mere sight of Kingdon's ghastly expression and foam-flecked lips, would stop the hilarity as swiftly and efficaciously as the sudden dropping of lights stills a chattering audience in a

theater. Now, to his astonishment, he realized that more than half the fellows were already regarding Kingdon without noticeable signs of uneasiness. Hornbrook looked that way, and met the amused glance of a pair of twinkling blue eyes. The new boy's lips, from which all traces of foam had vanished, twitched a little at the corners. His whole expression was so altered that Wash did not need the comment of one of the fellows to understand what had happened.

"Stung!" ejaculated a big, heavily built chap joyously. "I never expected to live to see the tables turned on the prize joker of Walcott Hall."

Hornbrook regarded the speaker quietly for a moment from beneath drooping lids. His face had turned a shade less brown and taken on a sort of strained, sharpened look that hinted at the pressure boiling up within him.

"It seems to amuse you very much, Lane," he said softly, yet with a brittle undercurrent in his voice. "Being such a bright and shining light in the joke line yourself, you're a judge of real humor."

Gerald Lane did well enough on the gridiron, but he had never shown any remarkable brilliancy in other lines. Just now his retort distinctly

lacked point, and Hornbrook, his self-esteem, somewhat satisfied, walked forward to pause beside the author of his discomfiture. For a few seconds he did not speak as he stood looking silently down into the blue eyes raised to his—eyes which were like candid wells of naïve innocence and truth.

“You didn’t do that doctor of yours justice,” Wash drawled, at length. “I never saw a quicker recovery.”

“You’re right,” murmured Kingdon. “There’s an apology coming to him. I might have known Castile soap pills would get results. Say,” he went on, a realistic look of appreciation creeping into his face, “that was a dandy stunt of yours, all right. You’re some jumper, that’s all I can say.”

Hornbrook’s face twitched slightly, and there was a pinched repression about his nostrils. “Oh, yes, I’m pretty fair at jumping,” he returned lightly, “and sometimes I land on people with both feet. When I do, somebody gets hurt. Savvy?”

Without waiting for a reply, he strolled on down the aisle, pausing for a word with one of the fellows, and finally disappearing into the rear car.

There was a touch of ungrudging admiration in the glance Kingdon cast after him. It was a good exit. Rex doubted his own ability to make one as effective under similar conditions. Not for an instant had Hornbrook lost his temper or self-control. In spite of the absurdity of his plight, he had preserved an outward semblance of calm, cool indifference. More than that, he had succeeded in leaving behind him a chilly, ominous atmosphere which was the most effectual antidote for levity. Guffaws quickly became chuckles, grins shrank to smiles. Several fellows hastily arose to follow the autocrat, while the majority of those who were left behind were not long about smoothing all signs of mirth from their faces. They realized, apparently, the unwisdom of even seeming to side against a chap of Hornbrook's great power and influence.

Of course, there were a few who continued to laugh in undisturbed contentment. Chip Hatfield was one of them. Left alone by the hurried departure of Pewee Hicks, he sat chuckling to himself for a few minutes. Then, moved by a sudden impulse, he arose and, crossing the aisle, dropped down beside Kingdon.

"Regular little old joker, aren't you?" he com-

mented, with twinkling eyes. "Somehow, you don't look it, either."

"My great-uncle was a clown in Barnum's," explained Rex gravely. "I reckon that's why it comes natural."

"Very likely," agreed Hatfield. "What I want to know is how you happened to wise up to Wash so easy. That spiel of his struck me as pretty clever."

"It was, and then some. Only for one thing I'd have thought he'd just broke loose from an asylum."

"What was the thing?"

There was a mirthful gleam in Kingdon's eyes. "You," he answered.

"Me! I like that! I never let a peep out of me."

"You didn't have to; you looked."

Hatfield lifted his eyebrows and shoulders in an expressive gesture. "Elucidate, kind sir," he requested. "Your uncle's naturally quick wit seems to be taking a vacation. When did I look?"

Kingdon laughed. "It was only a minute or so after he sat down. At first I thought there was something really queer about him. He got off that stuff about being the Prince of Wales

just the way a dotty person would do it; he even had the expression down pat. But when I turned to look at him, and caught every fellow in sight watching us, I began to think there was something phoney about the stunt."

"I don't see why we shouldn't have looked," protested Hatfield. "It was a perfectly natural thing to do. If a crazy chap came through the car and sat down and talked the way he did, I'll bet a hat you'd look at him right enough."

"Sure, but not that way. You tried to pretend you weren't looking. That was what put me wise, and so I began doping out a way of getting back at him."

"So, that was it," remarked Hatfield. "Well, we won't mention it to Wash. No use mitigating the effect of the medicine. A dose like that, now and then, does him good. I don't know when I've seen him handed such a take-down. You pulled that hydrophobia stuff almost well enough to deceive me. Must have got the details from the real thing, eh?"

Kingdon laughed and shook his head. "I have a fertile imagination, and I happened to have some soap in my bag where I could get at it.



Wasn't quite sure about the barking, but it seemed to make an impression."

"Nice touch. The whole performance was very artistic." Hatfield chuckled again at the recollection. Then his face sobered. "You sure have your nerve with you, though, putting one like that over on Wash Hornbrook. Looks as if you didn't give a hang whether you get on at school or not."

Rex was unable to tell from his companion's expression whether he was in earnest or not.

"What's he got to say or do about my getting on?" he ventured at last. "Do you mean he's one of those fellows who try and run everything from school athletics to dictating whether freshmen shall wear pea green caps or pink ribbons on their gym suits?"

Hatfield lay back and roared. "Wash would kill you if he heard that. Roughly speaking, though, you've hit it. Of course, if you're good enough, no fellow can really keep you permanently off the school teams. But Wash has a pile of influence, and if you get in bad with him, he can make things mighty unpleasant. Worst of all, he can turn you down for admission to the Clan."

"The Clan? Oh, that's one of your societies, isn't it? I remember Larry saying something

about it, but I didn't pay much attention at the time. Perhaps I could exist without joining. I'm not so desperately keen about secret societies—they're usually too narrow and hampering."

Hatfield's jaw dropped. "Hampering! Oh, but that's not the case here! You don't know what you're talking about. You'd fit in with the crowd like a pea in a pod. Everybody that amounts to anything belongs, and we have all the fun that's lying around loose, you can bet!"

"Oh, you belong, do you?" questioned Kingdon. Already he had taken a fancy to the older boy who was so pleasant and friendly. "Larry Phillips, too, I suppose?"

"Sure. All the fellows that count, do. It's called the Clan of Momus. I'm not keen about the name. Some dub who was sore over not being elected thought it up years ago, I believe, and it stuck. Names don't cut much ice, anyhow. It's the fun we have that counts—and we certainly get it, going and coming."

"What sort of fun?" inquired Kingdon.

"All kinds. We've been having more sport than a circus with some of the rubes in the car back there, for instance."

With the gusto of the truly appreciative, he

narrated the incident of the elderly passenger and the chewing gum; likewise the amusing anecdote of the accident to the youthful native's bag, followed by his hurried exit from the train.

"Wash planned both of those," he concluded, with a chuckle. "He may stick on lugs now and then and act as if he was made of different clay from the rest of us, but you've got to hand it to him. He certainly has the brains for thinking up stunts. The things he's pulled off at school would fill a book. Last June, at Commencement, he managed to dump two bottles of tobacco into the fruit punch they served at old Doc's reception. Murder!" His lips twitched at the recollection. "That sure was a scream. You'd see those pussy old ducks and fat dowagers fill their glasses, take a big gulp, and then turn purple in the face and do a Marathon to the ice-water——"

He stopped abruptly, and shot an embarrassed glance at Kingdon. "Guess I'm going it a little too fast," he said, in an altered tone. "Nobody outside the crowd is wise to who did it. If——it leaked out, things might be mighty unpleasant for Wash."

"I should imagine they might," agreed Kingdon. "The powers that be don't always have a

very keen sense of humor. You needn't worry about my letting anything out, if that's what you're thinking about. I'm no blab."

"I didn't mean that. I was just afraid you might let something slip without thinking. It was enough to make you split your sides. And there's been lots more just as funny stunts pulled off. You'd be right in your element, old man."

"I'm afraid not," returned Kingdon. "It happens I haven't any use at all for practical joking. Somebody's always bound to be hurt, and——"

"Nothing like it! You've got us wrong. Why, it isn't once in a coon's age any really rough stuff is pulled——"

"You don't have to knock a man down to hurt him," cut in Rex quickly. "Wouldn't you rather be put clean out in a boxing match or football scrimmage than to be put in the same position Hornbrook was a short time ago?"

"I sure would," agreed Hatfield instantly. "But——"

"There isn't any 'but' to it. In every practical joke somebody's made a fool of and his feelings hurt, or it wouldn't be any fun to the fellow who pulls it off."

"Going to start reforming the school?" questioned Hatfield, with a suspicion of a sneer.

Kingdon laughed. "Nothing like it. Life's too short. I haven't the least objection to what anybody else does. I'd rather get my own fun some other way, that's all."

For a moment or two Hatfield regarded him in speculative silence. "You're a queer duck," he said at last, "but I'm hanged if I don't sort of cotton to you just the same. Reckon that must be why I take all this trouble to put you hep. This independent stuff sounds very nice, but I repeat what I said a moment ago: You'll never get anywhere at Walcott Hall unless you're one of the Clan. All of the athletic crowd belong, and everybody else who amounts to anything. There's no two ways about it, you'll simply *have* to join—unless, of course, you've got Wash riled up so that he'll shut down on you altogether."

Kingdon's lips were parted for a careless refusal, but at Hatfield's last sentence they closed abruptly, leaving the words unuttered. The muscles of his jaw tightened the least bit.

"Hornbrook runs it to suit himself, then?" he drawled.

"Not exactly that. There's a regular vote of

all the members. But Wash is president, and he can always swing enough votes to down a fellow when he wants to."

"What are the qualifications for membership?" asked Rex curiously.

Hatfield hesitated an instant. "They're a little hard to put into words," he explained at length. "You've got to be a good fellow, and—well, have a sense of humor hits it about as well as anything. We only elect three freshmen, and, other things being about equal, we take the fellow who pulls off the brightest, most original stunt—practical joke, I s'pose you'd call it. Luckily, you've already made yourself eligible. If any boy can match the trick you played on Wash himself——"

"Oh, that counts, does it?"

"Sure." Hatfield's tone and manner had become suddenly brisk, as if he felt encouraged by some fresh idea. "You leave it to me. I believe I can get you in for all of Wash, though it won't be easy. All you have to do is to be halfway decent to him, and keep those views of yours about practical joking under your hat—till you're elected, anyway." He stood up abruptly. "I'd better be getting back to the other car. This is going to



take some diplomacy, but we'll pull it off, all right, so don't get discouraged."

"I won't," returned Rex, with a touch of dryness in his voice.

After Hatfield had departed, Kingdon sat silent for a moment or two, staring thoughtfully at the back of the seat ahead of him.

"No danger of that," he muttered at last, under his breath. "I'll make the high and mighty Hornbrook give me a personal invitation to join his precious society, and then I'll——"

"Westborough!" bawled the brakeman, suddenly flinging open the door, and thrusting in his head. "All out for Westborough!"

There was a general crowding into the aisles, a sudden bursting forth of chatter, laughter, and comment. Roused from his meditation, Rex realized that he had reached the end of his journey. Springing up, he reached for his bag and quickly joined the laughing, excited throng that was pushing toward the doors.

## CHAPTER VI.

### REX GETS AN IDEA.

As the train came to a stop, the boys sprang down the steps to mingle with the throng on the station platform. The air resounded with eager greetings, with joshing questions and comment, with bantering give-and-take. Fellows who had not met since June, rushed at one another in boisterous exuberance, and there was much slapping of backs and pounding of chests.

"Hi, old Splinter! How's the boy?"

"Here's Jud, fellows! Brought your muscle back, old man? Nice little cast-iron bunches, eh? We won't do a thing to Winchester this year—eh, no?"

"What's the latest thing in jestlets, Wash? Did you hold up the conductor and swipe his punch for a watch-charm?"

"Look at little Pewee! The child's grown an eighth of an inch! Bet it was Mellen's food did it."

"Impossible! There's a loss, if anything; the infant's shrunk. You'll have to show us, Pink."

"I will. Gimme a foot rule, and I'll prove it."

Standing a bit to one side, Rex watched the elaborately careful measurement, with an imaginary rule, of the diminutive Hicks, and heard the triumphant laughing announcement of three-thirty-seconds of an inch gain. In spite of his nonchalance, Kingdon felt, as every new lad does under such conditions, rather lonely and out of it. It seemed as if every fellow, except himself, had some friend in the crowd. He wondered where Larry Phillips was, and wished more than ever that the good-natured, red-headed chap might appear to relieve the slight awkwardness of the situation.

Before long, Rex became conscious of curious glances cast in his direction. There was some talk in undertones, too, mingled with laughter, that told him the details of his encounter with the school jester were being narrated.

Somehow, the feeling of being observed put him on his mettle. He no longer felt lonely; he was already part of the school. He had made his *début* in a manner which, whether it met with universal approval or not, was bound to attract

more general attention than the ordinary freshman received. Though at the present moment he knew just one fellow in the entire student body, it could not be long before he formed acquaintances of every sort and kind.

With a slight smile and a barely perceptible squaring of his shoulders, Rex picked up his bag and joined the movement that had already begun around one end of the small brick station. He found the baggage office here, with several wagons drawn up at the curb, and beside one of them, a man collecting trunk checks. Rex handed his over, and followed the example of the majority by stowing away his bag in one of the wagons. This left him free to join the line that was straggling across the road and into a footpath which led through a stretch of rolling pasture land. Passing through a gap in an old, vine-covered stone wall, he heard a sharp whistle from behind—the imperious, insistent sort of whistle which usually makes one turn instinctively to see what is wanted.

Kingdon did not turn. He had caught a fleeting glimpse of Hornbrook in the group just behind. The whistle was succeeded by a wheedling call: “Here, Fido! Nice Fido! Come, Fido!”

Still he continued on his way in bland and irritating oblivion.

"So that's the best you can do, is it?" he murmured. "If you think your uncle's going to nick his teeth on that old one——"

He shrugged his shoulders and smiled rather contemptuously at the weakness of Hornbrook's attempt. After all he had heard of the fellow's cleverness, he would have expected something better than that. Then he realized that this was probably just a casual attempt to "get a rise" out of him. If he had turned round at the sound of the whistle, a roar of laughter from Wash and his friends would surely have been his reward, and the nickname of "Fido" would have been fastened on him. Since he had refrained from biting, the joker must set his wits to work in earnest to evolve something worthy of his reputation. Rex had decided to be on the lookout for anything of the sort, when suddenly the big, serious-looking chap he had noticed on the car came briskly up from behind and fell into step.

"Hello!" he said, in an awkward, almost embarrassed, manner. "Going up alone? My name's Lane. I'll walk along, if you don't mind."

Kingdon assured him that it would be a pleasure, and made haste to introduce himself.

"Saw you on the train," rumbled Lane. "That was a peach of a trick you played on Hornbrook. Never knew anybody to do such a thing before. Want to look out for squalls, though. Wash is raw, and he'll do his best to get square."

"Naturally," said Rex. "Got any hints you can give me as to how he's apt to start about it?"

"Nary a hint. It takes somebody a whole lot sprier than I am to keep up with Wash's stunts. He's got a hair-trigger brain that's working all the time. The only thing certain, is that he'll likely do his best to keep you out of the Clan."

"So I've been told," laughed Rex, a trifle wearily. His appraising glance swept over the square, rather heavy, face of the chap beside him. "What if I told you I didn't give a hang whether I belonged or not?"

"If you feel that way, it's because you're new and don't understand." Lane spoke with swift impulsiveness, and then reddened a bit. "What I mean is," he went on more slowly, "that the Clan practically runs things here at Walcott Hall. The members control the Athletic Association and most of the teams, besides every other institution



that's worth while. If you don't belong, you're out of everything, and——"

"Do you belong?" interrupted Rex pointedly. Lane's flush deepened as he shook his head.

"Oh, I'm disqualified. I'm not clever enough."

"You're on the football team, aren't you?"

"That's only because I happen to have beef. There's no one else in the first squad who isn't a Clan man. I'm the exception that proves the rule, I guess. But you're sort of different. You'd fit in, and I'm sure you'd like the crowd. They're a lot of corking fellows—the best in the school."

"Can't one like them and be friendly even if he doesn't belong to their society?"

"Oh, I suppose so; but it's not the same thing. Naturally they're chummier with their own gang. They have their meetings and their secret business, and all the rest of it, which they couldn't talk about with an outsider. And I suppose, having the pick of the school in the society, they naturally aren't keen about going elsewhere for their friends. You mustn't think I'm sore or anything like that, because I'm not," he added, with an attractive kind of earnestness. "I'm not clever when it comes to repartee, and I'm very lucky to get on so well and be taken on the team."

In spite of his attempt at careless nonchalance, there was an undercurrent of regret in the big chap's voice, which Rex caught and understood. Unconsciously they had slowed up a little, and presently the laughing, chattering group, of which Wash Hornbrook was the center, overtook them. As they swept past the two lads, there was a general turning of heads and twisting of necks. Then someone laughed disagreeably.

"Jerry's rushing members for the Walcott Hall Heavyweights," sneered a voice that sounded like Hornbrook's. "All Clan discards please apply."

A dull red flamed into Lane's pleasant face. Kingdon's eyes narrowed, and a glint of anger leaped into them. The comment struck him as deliberately disagreeable and hateful, without even the saving grace of humor. At his side one muscular fist doubled unconsciously. Then, with a sudden flash of inspiration, his whole expression changed, and he burst into a laugh.

Lane stared; then stiffened a little. "I suppose it did sound funny to you!"

"It wasn't funny at all; just nasty and ill-tempered," Rex hastened to assure him. "I wasn't laughing at that, old man, but——" He drew closer and took Lane's arm. His eyes were bright,

and his lips still curved in a grin. "What do you say if we take the amiable Hornbrook at his word and organize a society of our own—a society that will be a rival to the Clan of Momus?"

## CHAPTER VII.

### WALCOTT HALL.

Lane's eyes widened incredulously. "You don't really mean——"

"Why not? I think it would be great sport."

"But what——"

"Oh, that doesn't matter a scrap," chuckled Kingdon, the idea gripping him more and more. "We'll call it any old thing. The A. C.'s would do, meaning Anti-Clans. We'll have grips and passwords and everything so horribly secret the other crowd will be up in the air in no time. We might even get pins; they don't cost much if they're not made of gold. As for members, there must be some decent fellows in school who aren't practical jokers."

As Rex poured out the explanation in his light, airy fashion, Lane's face cleared and a slow smile curved his lips.

"That would be sport," he admitted at length.

"They'd think we were in earnest and that it was an opposition stunt, while we'd just be fooling them. Look here, though, old man, this business would settle your hash for good and all, and prevent your ever becoming a member of the Clan. You want to remember that."

"I should worry. I told you a while ago that I didn't give a hang whether I belonged or not. Now I wouldn't join if they brought me an invitation on a gold tray. This paying them back in their own coin will be heaps more fun. Don't let a peep out of you, now. As soon as we're straightened out, we'll get together and—— Whew! So that's the school, eh? Pretty bad! No class to it at all, is there?"

They had emerged from a grove of pine trees that crowned the steep hill they had climbed from the station. The hill formed one end of a ridge, from which the ground sloped gently to the sparkling waters of a good-sized lake half a mile away. Farther along the curving ridge, at a point where it spread out in a natural plateau, clustered a mass of buildings of red brick and plaster. One, massive and mellowed, with walls hidden under the heavy growth of ivy, could be none other than the original "Hall," built more

than eighty years ago. The others, basking in the mellow glow of the September sun, looked newer, but were almost as picturesque.

Below them, halfway down the slope, was another level stretch, on which was laid out a well-appointed athletic field. There was a fine cinder track, and a diamond and gridiron. There was likewise a very decent grandstand, the lower part boarded in for a dressing room for the players. On the opposite slope gleamed a red flag or two, indicating a golf course. Nestling among the trees down by the lake could be glimpsed the roof of a boathouse.

In the picture there was a sense of spaciousness, and of freedom, that was very pleasing. At the far side of the lake, the banks rose steeply with an air of rocky, well-wooded wilderness. On the other hand, the view down the valley was limited only by one's eyesight and the weather conditions. Just now the far-distant hills were clothed with a faint mist that did not obscure so much as it melted them into the horizon. What lay between became a widespread, fascinating mingling of hill and dale, of stream and forest, of roads winding like saffron ribbons through hamlets and past farms until they were swal-



lowed up at last in that same distant haze. There were few buildings to be seen, but here and there, out of the thick green, rose a slender white church spire, like some slim admonitory finger, stretching upward toward the blue heavens.

Rex drew a long breath of satisfaction. Phillips had often described the school and its unusual situation, and raved about it, but Kingdon had pictured nothing so fascinating as this. And just because he was oddly thrilled and his imagination stirred, he yawned and clapped Lane on the shoulder.

"Terribly cramped, old top," he said. "So hemmed in I should think a fellow would have a hard time breathing. What sort of a field have you got?"

"Oh, some field." assured the other, as they started on again. "Want to go down and take a look? Guess we've time before supper."

Rex was about to acquiesce, when he caught sight of the belated Larry Phillips hurrying toward them from the direction of the school.

"Guess I'll wait till later, old man," he answered. "Now, don't forget to keep a still tongue in your head about what we were talking over. We don't want to let out even a hint until we've

had time to work up all the mysterious business we can. Hello, Red! Forget to wind the alarm?"

"Hello, you kinky-haired goat!" greeted Phillips fondly. "Same homely mutt I left on the rock-bound coast of Maine. Meant to come down to the station to meet you, but I got into an argument with our tennis champion, and had to stop and show him how to play the game. Hello, Lane! How's the boy?"

With a casual hand-shake, he turned from the big chap, pulled Kingdon's arm through his own, and drew him a little to one side.

"What the mischief is all this stuff I've been hearing about you from Chip Hatfield just now?" he asked, in a low tone. "He says you've gone and put something over on Hornbrook that's got him down on you to beat the cars. Of course you hadn't any way of knowing, but I wish you'd tackled any other fellow. Wash has got a queer disposition, and if he wants to, he can keep you out——"

"Don't, don't tell me he's going to keep me out of the precious Clan!" begged Kingdon whimsically.

Phillips stared. "Why, how'd you know I was going to——"

"For the simple reason that I've been hearing nothing else since I played that silly little trick on your so-called prize jester. I'm sick of the subject, too, so let's talk about something else. Don't run away, Lane; we're not discussing secrets. I wish you two old-timers would put me wise to things here, so I won't be making bulls. Do I have to report at the school? If so, whom to? And how do I find out where my room is? There's a bunch of other questions I'm pining for an answer to."

Larry Phillips didn't want to change the subject, and wasn't in the least anxious for Lane's company. But Kingdon's manner, superficially light and airy, held an undercurrent of determination that did not encourage opposition. After all, there was no use making a fuss about the matter; it would be easy enough to take it up again when Rex had settled down a bit, and there would be a better chance for confidential talk. So, easy-going Larry accepted the situation without further protest, and proceeded to steer the new arrival in the right courses.

"You'll be in Old Hall, I reckon," he said, as they proceeded briskly along the walk toward the

school. "You'd better report to Snoopy, though, to be sure."

Lane groaned. "Snoopy back? Somebody said he was going——"

"No such luck!" exclaimed Phillips sadly. "He's here, right enough, with his three-inch collar and all his cunning little ways. Guess no other school would have him. One of the masters," he explained to Rex. "He's a shark at Math, but one awful sneak. All the time snoop-ing around evenings in slippers or rubber soles to catch the fellows. Of course, we all love him to death."

"Must be a popular person," chuckled Kingdon. "I've run up against that kind before."

They had reached the level, grassy stretch in front of Old Hall, and Rex was really more interested in his surroundings than in the conversation. The venerable ivy-clad edifice was built around three sides of a quadrangle, the fourth consisting of a low, red brick cloister that connected the north and south wings and formed a covered way from the administrative offices to the chapel. This cloister, with its wide, open spaces and shallow stone seats between the square pillars, was evidently a favorite gathering place

for the boys. Just now, at least, they occupied it to overcrowding, sprawling on the grass, leaning against the columns, or dangling their feet from the stone-capped parapet. Many of them called out jocular greetings to Phillips, while a few spoke to Lane; but neither of Kingdon's conductors paused for more than a word or two. Entering the cloister, they turned sharply to the right, and piloted Rex into the north wing, where they paused before one of the numerous doors opening on the wide hall.

"Here's where Old Top holds out," explained Phillips, in a low tone. "He's acting as secretary to-day. Hustle up and get through. We'll wait for you out here."

"What did you say his name was—Top?" whispered Kingdon, with an eye on the door, which was slightly ajar.

"Top? Oh, no! I called him Old Top. Term of endearment, you know." There was a barely perceptible hesitation in Phillips' manner before he recovered himself and went on smoothly: "His name is Toupey—T-o-u-p-e-y. And accent the last syllable strong, old man, if you want to have a drag with him forevermore. He likes to make out his ancestors were from gay Paree."

Apparently quite oblivious to the blank stare which Gerald Lane turned on the red-haired chap, Kingdon knocked briskly on the partly opened door. A sharp, nasal voice bade him enter. With a whimsical gesture of farewell to his companions, he stepped into the room, leaving the door slightly ajar behind him.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### A BAD BEGINNING.

It was a bright and cheerful room with three Western windows, through which slanted the long rays of the September sun. Rex found himself facing a broad, flat-topped desk behind which sat a man in his thirties, sharp-featured and rather narrow-shouldered, whose abnormally long neck was tightly enfolded in a collar of such height and stiffness that the boy's own throat was caught in a momentary choke of sympathy. A biggish nose was rigidly compressed by the patent clasp of gold-rimmed glasses, from which a gold chain curved over a prominent ear. The eyes that looked questioningly at Rex through the ample lenses were pale blue, and cold. In short, the master not only distinctly lacked good looks, but he was plainly stamped with the least desirable qualities of his profession—intolerance, suspicion of all boys and their motives, and a didactic love of authority.

For a moment or two Kingdon did not speak. He had assumed the shy, embarrassed air of a new boy in the presence of one of those superior beings who, for some time to come, would try to set his feet in the paths of learning, but his eyes, puzzled and inquiring, were shifting swiftly over the face and figure of the tutor. Something was wrong with the name Phillips had given him, but just what it was Rex could not make out. His comprehensive gaze took in the stiffish attitude and air of importance, no less than the physical peculiarities already mentioned, and then turned naturally to the smooth, sleek, carefully arranged mass of black hair that crowned the master's pear-shaped head. For an instant the lad's eyes rested there, keenly speculative. Then the lids drooped suddenly to hide the expression of gleeful comprehension flashing into them.

"Gee!" he murmured, under his breath. "I wonder if Red thought I'd swallow that—bait, hook, and sinker? He must have a poor idea of my——"

"Well?" impatiently queried the man behind the desk. "You haven't been struck dumb, I presume? What is it?"

Kingdon's manner instantly became concilia-

tory and apologetic. A stranger would almost have thought he blushed.

"I—beg pardon, sir," he faltered shyly. "Is this the place—— Are you—the secretary?"

"I am. You wish to register, I suppose? What name?"

"Rexford Kingdon, sir."

The lad's manner was all that the most exacting authority could desire. Without further comment, the master turned to a small filing cabinet at one end of the desk, happily unconscious, as he opened one of the drawers and twitched over the cards within, of the inaudible aside that followed.

"You needn't be so sour about it, old top," muttered Rex, under his breath. "I will say, though, if you are minus sugar, you've sand enough to start a grocery store. Think of wearing a wig in a boarding school!" His glance caressed the smooth black headpiece with untempered delight at its possibilities. "I can't quite make out whether it's full wig or just a toupée. If it's a full wig, it certainly is a dandy."

By this time the master had picked out a card.

"Your application states you intend entering the Fifth Form," he said, glancing severely at

Rex. "Did you take the examinations this morning?"

"This morning? Why no, sir! I've only just come."

"I thought as much!" There was an undercurrent almost of satisfaction in the man's tone. "If you'd taken the trouble to read the catalogue, you might——"

"But it says that those who don't arrive before the opening of term can be examined——"

"Silence, sir! Kindly refrain from interrupting me. That applies only to those boys who find it impossible to arrive a day earlier. You had no such excuse, I presume? No? I thought as much. When Doctor Tillinghast hears of this, he will be exceedingly displeased—exceedingly so. It is bad enough when unavoidably late-comers disturb the school routine, without having it upset through sheer carelessness or indifference. That is all. I shall take the matter up with the doctor. You have been assigned Room 38, Old Hall."

His manner, so needlessly biting and sarcastic, brought a glint of anger to Kingdon's eyes and a touch of added color to his cheeks. The mistake had been an entirely innocent one, resulting main-

ly from Phillips' assurance that nobody ever thought of arriving a day earlier to take the exams, and the master's tone seemed uncalled for. For a moment Rex had to bite his lip to keep from answering back; then, all at once, his annoyance was swept away by a sudden audacious resolve.

"I'm sorry I misunderstood the catalogue, Mr. Wiggin," he said smoothly.

"What's that?"

Like one shocked by an electric needle, the master stiffened and sat regarding the boy as if unable to credit the evidence of his hearing. Kingdon returned his stare with bland and innocent composure.

"I was saying how sorry I was——"

"What was it you called me?"

"Why, they said it was Wig—— Oh, I beg your pardon, sir! I've made a mistake! I'm sorry I got it twisted, but I'm no good at names. I remember now, though. It's Toupay, sir, and they said——"

"Silence! That will do!" The master's voice was not loud, but there was something about it, coupled with the white rage of the tense face, that disturbed even Kingdon's composure, and

made him wonder whether he hadn't passed the bounds of prudence. "My name is Topping, as you very well know," continued the master, in tones that shook a little with his hardly suppressed anger. "Your gross insolence, before you have been at the school an hour, shall be reported. You may leave the room."

The boy's lips parted under a momentary impulse to deny the fact of ever having heard the master's name before, but swiftly closed, leaving the words unuttered. Without betraying Phillips, he could not clear himself. Besides, he was even more to blame than Red himself. It was not as if the latter's attempted trick had been successful and Rex had fallen into the trap innocently. On the contrary, he had guessed at once who was in the wind; what followed was altogether his own doing.

With an entirely respectful demeanor, therefore, he merely inclined his head and, turning, stepped out into the hall, closing the door behind him.



## CHAPTER IX.

### THE GROUCH.

For a moment Rex thought his two friends had gone. Then Phillips' head was thrust round the corner of a passage only a few feet from the door, and he summoned Kingdon in a cautious whisper.

"It's up to us to get away from here double-quick," he explained, when Rex had joined them. "Snoopy's raw, and I don't want to be around when he comes out."

He led the way, and in silence the three hurried down the corridor. Lane's square face wore a worried expression. Phillips, however, regarded his friend with surprise and untempered admiration.

"You've sure got your nerve with you," he commented, when they had turned a corner. "By jing! Wiggin!" He choked mirthfully. "You wised up, then?"

"That you were stringing me? Red, you must think I'm easy! It is a wig, of course?"

"You bet. Head's like a billiard ball, I understand. Last year the crowd jollied him till he was about wild. Say, didn't he light into you, though! Now he'll hot-foot it to Doc the first minute he's off duty, and you'll be hauled up before the old boy to-morrow. Why the deuce did you have to go and improve on what I told you? You could have passed off the Toupay part on some bad, wicked boys who led you astray, but Wiggin—— He won't forget that in a hurry."

"Well, he can't more than have me fired," said Rex, successfully stifling the qualms he was beginning to feel. "What will he do, anyhow, Red—Doc Tillinghast, I mean?"

Phillips shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, I don't know. Put you on probation, most likely. That means you have to stay on the school level. Can't go down to the field, or lake, or anywhere; and you can't take part in any games. It's a beastly nuisance, and I wish you hadn't been so quick to get Snoopy on his ear."

Kingdon wished so, too, but refrained from voicing his feeling.

"He was so blamed disagreeable and snappy I

just couldn't help it," he explained. "Anyhow, it's done now, and there's no use crying about it. Where's this room of mine—number 38, Old Hall?"

"I thought you'd be here," said Phillips, with satisfaction. "They put mostly third and fourth-formers in Fiske, and the infants are in De Witt. Thirty-eight? Why, that's in the south wing right over me. I'm on the second floor near the chapel end. Wonder who they've stuck in with you?"

Rex wondered, too, as they raced up the broad, shallow stairs which led from the lower hall to the top of the house. His encounter with the master had momentarily driven from his mind the remembrance that all the rooms in Old Hall, at least, were double, and that a room-mate would be a certainty.

"I only hope he's half decent," he thought. "It'll make a pile of difference, cooped up in close quarters."

The others were interested, too. Even Lane showed signs of animation as Phillips flung open the last door of the corridor and they all entered the room which was to be Kingdon's home for the coming year. It was a homey sort of place, low-ceiled and simply furnished, but there was no

sign of the other occupant. Even the baggage, which might have given some clue, had not yet been brought up.

"Hasn't shown up yet," commented Red, glancing at his watch. "Hope he's not a freak. If he's too bad, we'll have to maneuver some way to get you changed. Well, I must beat it. It's pretty near six, and I want to catch one of the fellows before supper. When the gong rings, just follow the crowd, old man, and you'll land all right. See you later."

He hurried away, leaving the door open, as if he expected Lane to follow his example. The latter did, indeed, move slowly toward the hall, but paused on the threshold and turned a troubled face toward Rex.

"Look here, Kingdon," he said awkwardly, "I'm mighty sorry about that mess you got into with Snoopy."

"But you hadn't anything to do with it," said Rex, in surprise.

"I know. But I ought to have warned you that Red was putting up a game. The trouble is that I'm so slow——"

"Shucks!" laughed the blond lad. "Don't you worry over that for a minute. You couldn't

have spoiled Red's fun, could you? Of course not. And it wouldn't have made any difference if you had. I've only my own foolishness to blame, so cut out worrying about it. Where are you located? On this corridor, too?"

"No; but I'm on this floor, around in the central corridor. You're sure you're not saying that just to——"

"Sure thing!" smiled Rex. "It's my opinion you fellows are making a big fuss over nothing. Very likely old Topping will have a change of heart when he cools down, and not report me at all. I should think he'd feel awful foolish over going to the headmaster about his wig."

Lane shook his head dubiously. Evidently it was his habit of mind to fear the worst. But Kingdon's careless, off-handed dismissal of the subject apparently cheered him up considerably, for he departed with his heavy, serious face distinctly brighter.

Left alone, Rex hummed a tune and began a more critical survey of his quarters. The room was large and comfortable, and the furnishings, though Spartan in their simplicity, were sufficient for utilitarian purposes. A large double window, with a thinly padded seat beneath it, overlooked

the quadrangle and also gave one, above the low roof of the cloister, a pleasant glimpse of the distant valley view.

"A few pictures, and books, and a bunch of comfortable cushions will make a mighty nice place of it," he murmured, glancing interestedly down at the multitude of boys of all sorts and sizes who thronged the cloister or bustled through the quadrangle. "Now, if I only draw a decent——"

He broke off abruptly, and turned around. The door had been thrust open with a force that indicated either haste or temper. It was slammed with an emphasis that would have been unmistakable, putting out of consideration the scowl on the face of the lad who entered. He was tall, big-boned and heavily built, and looked a year or so older than Rex. His features were rough-hewn with a touch, almost, of the Indian about their molding. His hair and eyes were coal black; the former coarse, thick and wiry; the latter, under their heavy brows, glowering sullenly at Kingdon.

"Huh!" he grunted presently, turning and dropping his leather bag on a chair. "I might have known I'd draw a freshman!"



The words, perhaps, amounted to little, but the fellow's tone was undeniably insulting. The color deepened a trifle in Rex's cheeks; otherwise his tranquil expression did not alter.

"Aren't you one?" he asked innocently. "I thought——"

"The less you think about me the better," interrupted the other lad imperiously. He had turned his back on Rex, and was surveying his surroundings with an expression of acute distaste. "I've got to room here, but nobody can make me chummy with any curly-haired little kid they happen to put with me."

For an instant Rex looked angry; then, all at once, a wide smile curved the corners of his expressive mouth. "I see you're exclusive," he said, in an awed tone. "You must be the president of this Clan thing I've been hearing so much about."

The dark-haired lad whirled, his face ugly. "Clan!" he snarled. "Don't talk to me about that fool business! I wouldn't belong if the whole bunch got down on their knees and begged me to." He paused, breathing hard and glaring defiantly at Kingdon. "Well," he snapped, "which side do you want?"

"Side?" repeated Rex bewilderedly.

"Yes, side! Side of the room. Don't you understand English? You take one side and I take the other. What else did you think the double furniture was for?"

"Oh, I see!" murmured Kingdon. "Why, I don't give a hang. One side looks as good as the other. Suppose you make your choice, and I'll take what's left."

Curiously enough, this didn't seem to suit the other boy at all. His scowl deepened and a look of actual disappointment came into his face, as if he would rather have had Rex choose, and then raised an argument over it. He stared from one to the other of the two narrow iron beds, apparently trying to discern some difference between them. Then, with a muttered exclamation of petulance, he picked up his bag and hurled it over to the side on the right of the door. Following it a moment later, he flung off his coat, jerked up his sleeves, and, pouring some water, began to wash his face and hands with that same explosive vigor he had shown in other ways.

After a minute or two of interested contemplation, Rex followed his example. He was still scrubbing when the muffled voice of his roommate addressed him from the depths of a towel.

"A line drawn from the middle of the door cuts the window-seat in half. This side's mine; that's yours. Just keep that in mind, and stay on your own side."

He extracted a pair of brushes from his bag and parted his hair with two slashing movements of his big, strong hands.

"You can doll up over there with pillows and pictures all you like, but don't let any of your junk drift over the line. I hate fussiness. Also kindly remember that I never lend anything."

Firing the brushes back into his bag, the strange boy ostentatiously locked it and pocketed the key. Giving a glance, almost of pleasure, at Kingdon's disordered locks, he started for the door. He opened it and was halfway out into the hall when Rex recovered himself sufficiently to call after him:

"You didn't tell me your name. Mine's Rex Kingdon."

"Is it?" came back in an ill-tempered growl. "Mine's Midkiff."

A door-slam did duty for a period. For a moment or two Rex stared at the closed door before turning to survey himself in the glass of the tall bureau.

"Midkiff!" he muttered, trying to smooth his rebellious locks with both hands. "He's a peach!"

Suddenly, as he saw the funny side of the encounter, the frown vanished and a wide grin overspread his face.

"A jovial spirit," he murmured whimsically. "Full of merry crips and infinite jesting. It wouldn't have hurt the grouch to lend me a comb; must have seen I hadn't my bag here. I can see where life within these four walls, with Midkiff, will be a regular scream—one grand, sweet song!"

## CHAPTER X.

### THE SHADOW OF A BLUNDER.

"Grouch Midkiff!" ejaculated Phillips, when he heard the name. "Murder! They must have something against you, kid, to saddle you with that sourball. I don't s'pose Snoopy had anything to do with it, but it looks—— Well, it's up to us to think of some way of bringing about a shift. I'd about as soon room with a wild boar."

"What's his particular trouble?" inquired Rex, as they strolled out into the quadrangle. "Disappointment in love, or what?"

"Nothing that I know of. He's just a natural-born grouch, and the most unsociable cub in school. Come on over to the cloister, and we'll think up a way to get rid of him."

It was the hour of freedom between supper and the evening study period. Most of the older boys had sought the open, some strolling about the grounds in pairs or quartettes, while others

gathered in front of Old Hall to toss a baseball, pass a football about an ever-increasing circle of fellows, or were engaged in some other sort of activity.

There was a line ranged along the coping of the cloister, passing the time with talk and laughter and much joshing criticism of the athletes.

Wash Hornbrook was with them. He sat dangling his feet at one end of the line, and Kingdon observed that Wash seemed to be the life of his particular group. Evidently the setback on the train had not long affected his spirits. He quite ignored Rex, as did most of the crowd about him. But Chip Hatfield presently detached himself from the throng and, strolling along the cloister, stopped behind Phillips and Kingdon.

"How's the boy?" he drawled. "Get settled all right?"

"He's settled to the extent of having Grouch Midkiff for a room-mate," spoke up Phillips before Rex could open his mouth.

Hatfield grinned. "Somebody must love you, old man," he chuckled. "You'll have to be the beaming sunshine for two, all right. I don't believe Grouch knows how to laugh."

"He don't," agreed Phillips. "Never mind,



I've an idea," he went on, turning to Kingdon. "Naturally, you'd do almost anything to get rid of him. Now, I don't see why you couldn't——"

"Hold on, Red," objected Kingdon good-naturedly. "You're going a bit too fast. I'm not sure I want to get rid of him. He rather amuses me, you know."

Hatfield roared, and Phillips stared at the new boy as if doubting the evidence of his hearing.

"Amuses you!" ejaculated the latter. "Suffering saints! You must have a weird idea of what's amusing!"

"He'll be good practice," said Rex, his eyes twinkling. "Think of having a fellow around who never laughs! He'll be a positive inspiration. Anybody who can make him crack a smile should have the ordinary mortal in hysterics. You'd better hold your horses and let things stay as they are for a while, anyhow."

Phillips shrugged his shoulders. "Suit yourself. You're the doctor. There's one thing, though, you can't get away from. You don't seem to have thought about it at all, either. Snoopy's the one who'll examine you in Math tomorrow. After what happened to-day, I wouldn't give a whole lot for your chance of passing."

This time it was Kingdon's jaw that dropped. Somehow, he hadn't considered that phase of the situation at all, and the more he thought of it the more unpleasant seemed his predicament. Mathematics was one of his weakest points. Only for Phillips' coaching during the past summer, he would never have considered even trying for the Fifth Form. And now, after all that work, he had jeopardized his chances by an idiotic bit of foolery that had brought him nothing but fleeting amusement and cheap gratification. He tried to reassure himself, but even Hatfield, who seemed to look on life from an optimistic viewpoint, was not encouraging.

"He'll flunk you, surest thing you know," was his decided comment. "What a boob you were, Red! It's all your fault."

Phillips replied with some tartness, and a brief wrangle ensued. Peace was speedily restored, however. Red suggested that a hurried review of the subjects in question would do no harm, and the two hastily arose to depart.

"Good luck," Hatfield laughed. "If I knew the first principles of algebra, I'd come along and help, but I'm quite useless." He met Kingdon's glance, and his smile widened. "For a freshman,

you've stirred things up quite a bit in one day. Wash is down on you, and won't hear you and the Clan mentioned in the same breath. It's going to take a whole lot of persuasion, Red, to bring him around."

"Time enough for that later," returned Phillips, drawing Rex away. "Just at present boning's the important thing. Come on, old dull-head. We haven't got all night."

Kingdon obeyed, and at once they sought Red's room. Text-books were hunted up, and for more than two hours, Phillips put his friend through a vigorous review of the doubtful studies. For a careless, fun-loving, harum-scarum chap, Red certainly had a surprising grasp of his subject, and an unexpected ability at explanation.

In spite of that, Rex went to the examination, next morning, in rather low spirits. He was quite certain he had passed the other exams. If only he hadn't been such a gay blade, he reflected ruefully, he would likewise have skinned through Math, especially after Red's help of the night before. But now, of course, the scrawny-necked Topping would flunk him, no matter what kind of a paper he turned in.

The demeanor of the master was not encour-

aging. Three other boys, taking the examination, were already placed when Rex entered the class room. He was greeted by a glacial stare and a manner of extreme chilliness. In silence the paper of questions was handed to him. Then, as he started to take his seat within a few chairs of one of the other lads, Mr. Topping's nasal voice austere broke the silence:

"Not there, Kingdon. A little farther away from Wright, please—three or four seats, at least. It eliminates temptation."

Rex darted an indignant look at the man. His head held high, he walked the entire length of the room and took a seat in the back row.

"Old 'Top counters first chance," he thought. "Now, how can I get another jab at him?"

The most effective way would be to pass the examination, alone and unaided, with flying colors; but, when Rex had gone through the list of questions, his heart sank a little. There were ten of them. To pass he would have to answer six correctly. Five looked more or less possible; thanks to Red's coaching, he felt quite sure of them. Four had a discouraging aspect of utter unfamiliarity. The result, therefore, hinged

upon one problem which Kingdon wasn't quite certain about.

"I'll do it, though, just to spite him," he vowed under his breath. "I won't let him flunk me."

He squared himself to work. First of all, he answered the questions of which he was sure. Then he carefully re-examined the doubtful ones. They were quite hopeless; he hadn't the remotest idea about them. The result depended, as he had feared, on that single problem. He jotted down the theorem on one of the loose sheets of figuring paper, and studied it. Almost at once he realized that it was "a sticker." Something about it seemed familiar, but he puzzled and figured for half an hour before the light suddenly came. After that, the rest was easy. Within ten minutes he had worked out the problem and copied it neatly on the examination sheets. It was not long before Mr. Topping announced the completion of the allotted time.

"How'd you make out?" asked one of the other boys, joining Rex in the hall outside. "Pretty stiff, wasn't it?"

"Stiff as a wooden leg. I couldn't do four of them at all, and I had a beastly time with number seven."

"Seven!" cried the other lad, in surprise. "That was the biggest cinch of the lot. I thought everybody knew how to work out that old  $x$  plus  $2y$ , divided by——"

"*Two-y!*" ejaculated Kingdon sharply. "Why, I thought—— You must have made a mistake, old man. My paper had it  $y$  square."

Up to that moment he had been entirely sure of his point, but the other boy, whose name was Darby, stuck to his reading of the problem with equal tenacity. When the other two boys, who had taken the examination, were called into the argument, both sided with Darby, forcing Rex to the unpleasant conclusion that he had made a fatal misreading. It was impossible for his question to have been different from the others. Done in mimeograph, the papers must therefore be identical. He had misread the figures, and, by a simple transposition, had made a totally different problem; incidentally, a problem that chanced to be considerably harder to solve than the original.

The boy's first feeling was one of irritation at himself for such stupidity; then came an impulse to return to Mr. Topping and tell him what he had done. He even left his companions and



walked halfway back along the corridor before he pulled himself up with a jerk.

"I'll be hanged if I will!" he exclaimed. "It wouldn't make any difference, and I won't give him the satisfaction of turning me down. I haven't solved his problem, and that's all there is to it. It's nothing to him that, like a simp, I've worked out a harder example. He can flunk me, and of course he will jump at the chance. Good night, Rex! Your cake is all dough!"

## CHAPTER XI.

### SOMETHING UNEXPECTED.

Knowing the reputation of the school for strict scholarship, Rex awaited the announcement of his fate with considerable inward uneasiness. He refrained from confiding, even to Phillips, the truth about the mistake he had made, and he put off unpacking his trunk until it became certain he would remain in Old Hall. This delay brought down upon his head some caustic comments from Midkiff.

During the afternoon, which happened to be rainy, the latter put forth several broad hints as to the desirability of the trunk's removal. Just before supper, he ostentatiously shoved it back across the invisible line that divided the room into two private apartments. When Kingdon refused to respond to any of these hints, the big chap was forced to plain speaking.

"Why the deuce don't you unpack and send the thing to the trunk room?" he growled, as they were making ready for bed. "Big clumsy hulk

that fills the whole room and looks like the dickens!"

Kingdon's eyebrows went up. "Think so?" he murmured, in a pained tone, doubtfully surveying the article in question. "I rather like to have it about, you know. Think of all it will hold."

"Rubbish much better thrown away," grumbled Midkiff, pulling off his second shoe and making a careful arrangement of the pair beside his chair. "You don't mean to keep it here for good, I hope?"

"It wouldn't be half bad up against the wall. With a couch cover thrown over it, and a couple of pillows, it would make a dandy seat." Rex's voice grew suddenly firmer as a disgusted grunt came from his room-mate. "It's my half of the room, and I guess I can do as I please with it. You don't have to look this way if it hurts you."

Midkiff's grunt changed to a growl. He slid into a nightshirt of severely simple cut, got into bed, drew the covers well about his neck, and turned his face to the wall. The fellow's ill temper was so evident that, the moment the big shoulders were turned toward the room, Kingdon's face relaxed into a grin, and he shook with silent laughter.

"You're so easy it's not much fun getting you to bite," he thought.

But presently, as he leisurely continued disrobing, the smile faded from his lips and his bright eyes sparkled with the dawning of a new idea. He surveyed Midkiff's side of the room, noting the stiff exactness of everything, from the brushes on the bureau top to the clothes carefully arranged upon the chair. His eyes sought the space over the door, then followed an invisible dividing line across the floor to the window-seat, and continued on up to the ceiling above the low casements.

Having put out the light and crawled between the sheets, he lay for half an hour or more, staring up into the darkness and working out details of the fun he would have with old Midkiff—if he were allowed to stay in the Fifth Form and keep his present quarters.

On the way from breakfast next morning, his hopes in that line were dashed with a thoroughness that left no room for doubt. He questioned Red Phillips, and learned that even a single condition was not tolerated by Dr. Tillinghast at the entrance examinations.

"After he's once in, a fellow has a chance to

work off a single 'con,' if that's all he's been soaked with; but you've got to have sixty per cent. or over in every blooming exam, or else drop to the Fourth."

Red eyed his friend with a severity tinged with uneasiness.

"You don't think you've flunked, I hope? You answered six questions in Math, and that was the worst——"

"Maybe I didn't answer 'em right," admitted Rex. "Or, perhaps, Snoopy's influence will be too much for me. I just wanted to know what to be ready for in case the worst happens. I suppose we'll know some time this morning?"

"We will. Snoopy'll read the results in first period. He loves it, especially when he's flunked a bunch. By the way, I wonder why you haven't heard from old Tilly? I'll bet Snoops didn't lose a minute about hot-footing it to him the other day."

Rex had been wondering the same thing, but he had no suggestion to hazard.

To the accompaniment of a certain amount of mild horseplay, the boys made their way through the long corridor to the big assembly room. Here, at desks on successively raised platforms, they

gathered, before filing out to their various recitations, to hear any announcements or instructions which might be made. Phillips and Kingdon had barely taken their seats when Mr. Topping, frowning impatiently and carrying in one hand a sheaf of papers, entered abruptly and stepped upon the platform at the lower end of the room.

"Attention, if you please," he requested, in the stiff, authoritative manner that was one of the causes of his unpopularity. "I have to announce the results of yesterday's examinations. Before doing so, I wish to state that R. Kingdon is wanted at once by the head master in his study."

An instant Rex sat motionless, surprised into inaction. Then a sharp dig from Red's elbow brought him to his feet, a little flushed and uncomfortably conscious of the multitude of eyes fixed upon him. Recovering himself, he moved toward the door. His manner was a trifle stiff, perhaps, but it conveyed, on the whole, a very creditable assumption of casual indifference. Passing the front of the platform, his eyes veered for a second to meet the master's gaze, which was full of what seemed to be vindictive triumph. The boy passed on, his color a trifle



higher, reaching the corridor with cheeks red and eyes snapping.

"Tickled over with what he's done," he muttered. "He's flunked me, of course, and reported me to the doctor, besides. Seems to me, though, in his place I wouldn't gloat quite as openly over getting square with a pupil."

Though Dr. Tillinghast occupied a detached house some distance from the school buildings, his study, where he was to be found every morning from eight-thirty until one, was in the same wing of Old Hall that had already become familiar to Rex through his first encounter with Mr. Topping. Still indignant, and a little bitter at what he felt was a mean sort of revenge on the part of the tutor, the lad made his way thither. The doctor's secretary admitted him at once to the inner office where the head of Walcott Hall sat esconced behind a flat-topped mahogany desk, the bareness of which gave no hint at the business conducted across it every day.

Though his thick dark hair was sprinkled with gray, the Rev. Dr. Tillinghast was not a noticeably old man. Studying the wide brow, the well-shaped mouth, and the kindly eyes radiating fine wrinkles from the corners, one might have

pronounced him the sort of man who would never grow really old at heart, a man whose keen sympathy and understanding of youth would keep him mentally young, at least. His expression was so pleasant and amiable that many, on first seeing him, wondered how he managed to maintain discipline in a school the size of Walcott Hall, wondered until they took in the square, resolute chin and the firm set of the lips, and then decided it wasn't so remarkable, after all.

This morning he looked more than usually amiable. Kingdon, returning his cheerful greeting, could discern no signs of displeasure or reproof. Rex wondered. Even if he thought Snoopy's complaint a trivial one that reflected as much on tutor as pupil, the head master would be duty bound to take sides with his subordinate.

"Good morning, my boy. Kingdon, isn't it? I thought so. Well, Rexford, I've been going over your examination marks, and find you've passed everything save algebra, with flying colors. In the latter I see that you've answered only five of the ten questions correctly. Our rules, you know, allow of no conditions for entering, and therefore there would seem no question

of your having to drop into the Fourth Form——”

He paused to adjust his glasses, reaching for a folded paper lying at one end of his desk, which Rex at once recognized as the one he had handed in the day before at the conclusion of the Algebra examination. He was prolonging the agony, the boy thought bitterly. Topping had flunked him, just as he supposed he would. A dull red crept into Kingdon's cheeks, and his lips tightened. It was a mean trick. Anyone else would have understood that his mistake in the seventh question had been unintentional, and would have given him credit for solving a much more difficult problem than the original. But, of course, Snoopy was only too delighted——

“Except,” continued Dr. Tillinghast, having hooked the glasses astride his nose and opened the paper, “for a curious fact which Mr. Topping has brought to my attention.”

Kingdon's jaw dropped a bit and his eyes widened. “Mr. Topping!” he breathed dazedly. “I don't under——”

“In question number seven,” explained the head master briskly, “by a simple transposition of the figure two, you have completely altered

the problem, changing it to one more difficult than the original. This you have worked out correctly, and Mr. Topping believes that you should be given the credit and your mark raised accordingly. On consideration, I am inclined to agree with him, provided you can assure me that the mistake was, as I suppose, inadvertent."

Kingdon's face was crimson. For a moment he could not seem to speak, but he met the doctor's keen, appraising glance without faltering. "Ye-yes, sir," he stammered at length. "It was—quite so. I didn't realize what I'd done till I got outside and was talking to the other fellows."

"Oh, you did discover it, then? Why didn't you go back and explain to Mr. Topping?"

Rex's eyes dropped and he fumbled nervously with his scarf. "I didn't think it would—— It seemed too late, sir. I'd made the mistake and it was up to me to—er—take my medicine."

The head master laughed a little. "Well, well! Just a bit heroic, don't you think? However, it has turned out all right, thanks to Mr. Topping's broad-mindedness. You're a full-fledged member of the Fifth Form now, and I feel sure you'll do it credit. You see, Rexford, I look to the boys in the two upper forms to

act as a sort of curb on the younger lads. It's far better and more effective than to have an overly strict supervision of masters or monitors. The little boys are quick to follow the example of lads they admire and like. You play football?"

"Yes, sir; I always have."

"Then you should come out for the school team. There's nothing like athletics, undertaken in moderation, to broaden and develop character. It will help, too, to make you popular with the younger boys. Now and then I've been disappointed at the sort of example set by some of the upper classmen, but I scarcely think that will be the case here." Smiling at the lad in a fashion which made Rex warm to him, he leaned back in his chair. "You'd better report to Mr. MacArthur in Room 5. Your class will be there."

Still somewhat flushed of face, and dazed, Rex continued to stare doubtfully at him.

"Is that all, sir?" he stammered.

The doctor nodded.

With a word or two of respectful leave-taking, Rex turned and passed out of the room.

## CHAPTER XII.

### "THE GREAT DIVIDE."

His brain in a whirl, the boy hurried through the outer office and down the corridor leading to the various recitation rooms. The unexpected action of Mr. Topping was incomprehensible. Having prepared himself to be a martyr, the sudden sweeping away of the ground under his feet, made Rex feel rather foolish.

"I don't see why he kept still about that wig business," he grumbled. "What's his object, anyhow? If he thinks that because of this I'm going to soft soap him and curry favor, he's mistaken."

However, when he realized that his worries were over and that he was a full-fledged, unencumbered member of the Fifth Form, Rex was thankful. So, also, were Phillips and Chip Hatfield, who met him between recitations and eagerly inquired the result of his interview with the doctor.

"Great!" exclaimed Red jubilantly. "Now you won't have that to worry about. Hang the rain!" he went on, glancing out a window at the persistent downpour. "Nothing doing about the squad this aft, that's certain. Better look me up after dinner, King, and we'll find some way of amusing ourselves."

Kingdon's reply was distinctly evasive. He had other plans, and when the afternoon study period was over, he proceeded to carry them out. Having seen Midkiff headed toward the library, he smiled his satisfaction, cleverly evaded Phillips, and hustled up to his room, locking the door behind him. Then he emptied his trunk and a smaller packing box that had come by express, littering the entire room with their contents. Of this medley his clothes were speedily stowed away in closet and chiffonier, and the books were arranged in a small case standing at one side of the window-seat. The remainder consisted of pictures, framed and unframed, posters, gaily covered cushions, a couch cover, tennis rackets, a lacrosse stick, boxing gloves, and a quantity of other smaller articles, decorative and otherwise. Rex surveyed them with languid surprise.



"Had no idea there was so much," he murmured. "Wonder where the deuce I can stow it all."

Suddenly his eyes crinkled. "Rubbish, much better thrown away!" he growled in Midkiff's deep tones. "Wouldn't he throw a fit if he came in now! And won't he throw several when he views the result of my decorative streak!"

He had stripped off his coat and rolled up his shirt sleeves above his elbows. Without any further delay, he set to work in a systematic manner that would almost have roused the admiration of the precise and orderly Midkiff himself.

The pictures were hung along the long wall over bed, bureau and washstand. He had to scatter them pretty thickly there, and at the ends of his half of the room, but, in spite of that, the effect was very good. The place seemed to brighten, and from a drab monotone it took on color and individuality. The lacrosse stick, over the bookcase, and the boxing gloves, hung at one side of the double window, gave another good touch.

Having gone thus far, Rex paused and thoughtfully surveyed the window-seat. The

tufted pad that covered it was of good material, but of an exceedingly dull and lifeless shade of gray. Comparing it with the almost gaudy colors in a length of Eastern stuff, Rex chuckled and fell upon the latter joyfully. Carefully doubling it, he spread it smoothly over precisely one-half of the window-seat, bringing the edge just to that imaginary line Midkiff had drawn from the middle of the door to the middle of the windows. With the gay pillows piled on it, the effect was precisely as if a great pair of shears had snipped the covering of the seat in half, leaving on one side only the bare bones of stuffing.

Delightedly, Rex proceeded to increase that effect. A long, narrow, brightly-colored poster, delineating college life as it exists nowhere save in the mind of an artist, was cut through the middle, and half of it was tacked up over the window, the cut edge kept close to that invisible guiding line. Another poster—a decorative athletic scene—similarly treated, was placed over the door. The boy took a cheap little wooden bracket he had stuck into his trunk at the last moment, deliberately cut it in half with his knife, and hung it on the casing just over the window. Then, ruthlessly—for the delight of doing a

thorough job made him regardless of all else—he similarly divided a plaster copy of one of Barye's admirable lions, and set the mutilated head and shoulders on the piece of bracket.

The result was beyond his hopes. That half-bracket bearing the portion of a plaster lion emerging, apparently, out of thin air, was the touch which seemed to draw the whole absurd conception into uniformity. The effect was exactly as if two entirely different rooms—one the gay, cheerful, typical school or college room, and the other a dull, drab, uninteresting and almost characterless apartment—had been sliced asunder and the wrong halves fitted together. One could almost see the invisible line of demarcation. Rex stared delightedly and began to chuckle to himself.

“Couldn’t have been better. I wonder what the old boy’ll say when——”

He broke off abruptly as a hand tried the door-knob and rattled it impatiently. For an instant Rex hesitated. He wasn’t quite ready for Midkiff. He wanted to get the trunk and other things cleared away so that the room would be spick and span. He was thinking up some plausible reason

for keeping the Grouch out when a familiar voice relieved him of that necessity:

"Hi, there, King? What's the matter? Why so exclusive? Open up, you old chump!"

It was Phillips. Hastily opening the door, Rex found Chip Hatfield likewise standing there.

"I thought I told you to look me up," reproved Red, as the two stepped into the room. "You want to realize, my son, that when a freshman is treated the way you've been, it's up to him—Holy smoke! What in all creation have you——What kind of a nightmare is this, anyhow?"

He stared around in amazement, while Hatfield, uttering an exaggerated moan of horror, sank on a chair.

"Take it away!" groaned Chip. "It'll make me cross-eyed."

"Don't you like it?" queried Rex, smiling.

"But what do you call it? What's it for?"

"It ought to be called the Great Divide," suggested Hatfield before Rex could answer.

His suggestion was received with joyous approval by the other two, and Rex proceeded to explain briefly. He did not have to go far, however. Both boys knew Midkiff of old and were familiar with his many idiosyncrasies.

"Last year he roomed with a Third Former over in Fiske," chuckled Phillips, "and the poor kid didn't dare put up even a school banner for fear Grouch would leap on him. Has he seen it yet?"

Rex shook his head. "No, and I don't want him to till I've straightened up a bit. Give me a hand with this trunk, will you? We'll stick it outside with the box, and get the janitor to take it away."

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE GROUCH IS AROUSED.

The two visitors readily lent a hand, and in five minutes the room was neat as a new pin.

"I was going to get you downstairs to chin a bit," remarked Phillips, taking possession of the most comfortable chair; "but now I think I'll stay here and see how Grouchy takes it when he comes in. Eh, Chip?"

Hatfield nodded agreement from the comfortable end of the window-seat. Red turned again to Kingdon.

"It's about the Clan, old man," he explained. "I've been sounding Wash and one or two of the fellows, and I'm afraid there'll be nothing doing for you for a while, at least. Wash seems indifferent, but I can tell from the way he acts that he's down on you for that business on the train. He's got too much influence for us to try to buck him just now. You're coming out for football, of course?"

"What's that got to do with this other business?"

"Just this: Wash is captain, and you're sure to run up against him more or less. Of course I don't want you to bootlick him, or anything like that, but just don't—well, ruffle him, you know. I'm sure he'll come round after—— What are you grinning at, you goat?"

"You," laughed Rex. "You don't do that sort of thing well, old man. Such counsels of peace and slavish submission don't go at all well with your red wig, either. But you needn't bother to think up any more arguments. Without casting any asparagus on present company, or your esteemed society, I don't want to join it, and I don't intend to."

Phillips' eyes widened, and Hatfield suddenly sat erect. "Oh, come now!" protested the former. "Don't be a chump! There's no sense making it a case of sour grapes."

"Nothing like it," cut in Kingdon. "Honestly, I wouldn't join if Wash himself came and asked me."

"But why on earth——"

"I don't like your object or your methods. I don't like the idea of a secret society in a board-



ing school. It's almost sure to be snobbish and cause lots of ill feeling. We'll get enough of that sort of thing in college. That's straight goods, Red."

"Huh!" grunted Phillips a bit scornfully. "Going to turn into a blooming reformer?"

"Not I. That's what Hatfield said the other day, and I told him just what I'm telling you. I don't give a hoot what other people do as long as I'm let alone to——"

He stopped abruptly as, without warning, the door opened suddenly to admit his room-mate. Midkiff paused on the threshold, evidently somewhat surprised at the company he perceived. Then, all at once, he seemed to take in the novel scheme of decoration, for his head went up, his eyes bulged, his startled gaze veered swiftly around the room to rest at last on Kingdon's face with an expression as if he feared Rex had gone suddenly mad. It was irresistibly funny, and sent Phillips and Hatfield into roars of laughter. Kingdon, alone, remained quite serious.

"Don't you like it, Jawn?" he questioned in a grieved tone and with perfect seriousness. Midkiff's baptismal name was John, and Rex lingered

on the first syllable after the fashion of an English cockney. "I thought it was a really clever way out of our difficulty."

Midkiff snorted contemptuously and strode frowning over to his bureau. "Clever? Huh!" he growled. "Looks like a nightmare!"

"Hatfield calls it the Great Divide," murmured Rex. "Don't you like that? It's rather distinguished and different, you know, to have your room specially christened."

"Then it ought to be called the Great Idiocy," affirmed Midkiff in his ill-tempered way. "If that's the best you three can do in an afternoon's time, I can't say much for your brains."

"Oh, fi, fi! How harsh you are, Jawn! I did it all by my little self when you refused to let any of my belongings stray over into your half of the apartment. I had to put them somewhere, you know."

"You didn't have to chop the hind parts off that critter and stick him up on half a bracket. That's a pretty object, I must say!"

Rex shook his head sadly. "I'm afraid you've no imagination, Jawn, and hardly any sense of humor," he mourned. "Now, most fellows would see——"

"Well, I don't!" interrupted the black-haired chap. "I don't want to, either." Having washed his hands and folded the towel with extreme precision, he turned and cast upon the two visitors a glance of speculation that was swiftly tinged with understanding.

"I'll be in your way only a minute longer, Phillips," he said cuttingly, smoothing his rebellious hair with swift jabs of the comb. "You're talking about taking him into your precious Clan, of course?"

Red laughed, but there was a faint undercurrent of pique in his tone. "What a clever guesser you are, Grouch!" he scoffed as he stood up. "It happens, though, that this crazy kid says he wouldn't join if he should be asked. Looks as if you'd been imparting some of your fool prejudices, hanged if it don't! Come on, Chip, let's get out of this before we're infected with the bug ourselves."

Having closed the door after them, Rex turned to find Midkiff still fussing with his hair. Meeting Kingdon's eyes in the glass, the big chap put down his brushes with an abruptness that seemed almost nervous. He reached for his coat, which hung over the back of a chair.

"You're more kinds of a fool than I thought you were!" he growled.

"Thanks!" laughed Rex. "I soak up compliments like a sponge. Just what happened to bring on this one?"

"You're going out for football, aren't you?"

"Naturally."

"Well, do you expect to get anywhere at all without belonging to the Clan? Don't you know that Wash Hornbrook and his precious chum, Cartwright, run the whole shooting match? Hasn't Phillips warned you that without the approval of those two, and the bunch that travels around with them, a fellow has no more chance of making the school team than he has of catching trout in the quadrangle?"

"Oh, come now, John!" protested Rex, startled for an instant out of his bantering mood. "It can't be as bad as that. If a chap can play, surely——"

"Rubbish! You might play like all the Hildebrands put together, and it wouldn't get you an inch without Hornbrook's approval."

"But how about Garry Lane? He's not very chummy with that bunch, that I can see."

"Maybe not, but how long has he been on the

team? How long will he stay? They stuck him in last fall for the Winchester game. He'd worked like a horse on the scrub for three years without getting a show, but last year they simply had to have more weight. If there's anyone else in the bunch who can throw even a bluff of taking his place, he'll be dropped back to the second this fall, mark my words!"

"Oh, say!" protested Rex. "That would be too raw! I can't believe——"

"You don't have to!" snapped Midkiff, the old scowl settling on his face again. "I don't know why I'm bothering myself to argue like this." He turned away with a movement of indifference, picking up his cap. "I'm sure it's nothing to me. I don't care a hang whether you make the team or not!"

The door closed behind him with a bang. Rex stood motionless for a moment, his face thoughtful; then he stepped to the washstand and absently filled the bowl. For a few minutes the gruff, grouchy fellow had given the impression of caring considerably. Kingdon was curiously disappointed by the final outburst.

"For a minute I almost thought it was me he was excited over," he murmured, slowly drying

his hands. "But it was just a grouch against the Clan, or his everlasting habit of running down everything. I sort of wish it had been me. He'd stick to a fellow through thick and thin, if he ever came to care enough."

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE CLASH.

Though Rex had been more or less impressed by Midkiff's unexpected outburst, he could not bring himself to believe the football situation to be quite as bad as his room-mate had made out. To be sure, both Phillips and Hatfield had hinted that Hornbrook was a good man to stand in with in case one wanted to get ahead in athletics generally, but that, as Kingdon understood, was because he was president of the Clan and influential with the members, most of whom were athletically inclined.

"Middy makes the worst of everything from force of habit," he thought. "Probably he's a bit sore because he's never been asked to join. Of course he'd run down Hornbrook and the whole crowd."

Nevertheless, when he donned his rather shabby football togs that afternoon and went



down to the field, his eyes were somewhat wider open than usual, and he took in a shade more of what went on about him than he might had it not been for Midkiff's tirade.

It was a scene to quicken the pulse of a football lover and bring added brightness to his eyes. In groups at one end of the field there must have been between sixty and seventy fellows, their attire denoting that they were out to try for the team. There were big boys and small, sturdy and light. Some were passing the time with jokes and horseplay, as if to show their careless confidence in the result; others stood about with anxious faces, frequently glancing at one or another of the awesome beings who controlled the immediate football destinies of them all.

The figures of last year's men were unmistakable amid the throng of new candidates. A careless slouch, a noticeable tranquillity of manner, a distinct ease and assurance of bearing, would have marked each one of these particular mortals without the envied crimson letters sprawling across the front of the heavy white sweaters. They were the favorites of fortune. The future held no worry or uncertainty for them, for their places on the team were assured. Instead of

keeping their distance and watching furtively the small group surrounding Wash Hornbrook, they were privileged to join it; more than one was summoned by a peremptory gesture from the autocrat to take part in the momentous discussion.

At first, Rex watched that group carelessly. Gradually he felt a growing curiosity to know what occupied them so intently and so long, and why they didn't get down to business. With such a mob waiting, it seemed to him that the natural course to follow would be to sort out the candidates into various squads and set them to work at one thing or another under the supervision of the older men, instead of spending unnecessary time talking it over. Presently Rex began to wonder whether all this delay and suspense hadn't been contrived by the captain of the team for the sole purpose of heightening his importance, and giving the new boys a good chance to understand how far away and difficult—and how desirable—was the goal before them.

Certainly Wash was looking uncommonly effective, as if he had spent not a little time on his appearance for this occasion. The snug, dark jersey and laced canvas vest fitted his fine figure

to perfection. Even the moleskins, with just the right amount of wear and tear showing on their surface, did not seem to partake of the usual baggy and shapeless nature of that article. The white and crimson of sweater and woolen stockings contrasted becomingly with the lad's coal-black hair, which looked as sleek and smooth and unruffled as if it had been molded. His expression was serious and important; his gestures, too, were quite in keeping.

Presently an amused smile curved the corners of Rex Kingdon's mouth. "Playing to the gallery!" he murmured under his breath. "Impressing the new kids with your importance. You sure are a good looker, all right, but you'd make a better fashion plate or magazine cover than a real football hero in action. I wish somebody'd set off a bomb under that bunch," he concluded with a sigh. "I'm getting tired standing around."

Almost as he spoke, the group suddenly broke up, and three of the members, each armed with pencil and paper, began circulating among the waiting candidates. As soon as a boy's pedigree was taken, he was sent to one part of the field or another, to be put through his paces by the older

fellows. Phillips, for instance, instructed them in passing and falling on the ball; another lad overlooked the kicking and punting; still another had charge of the tackling dummy. Rex observed that Hornbrook took no active part in the work, appearing content to stroll from group to group, pausing now and then to watch some new boy's performance with a critical expression, and making an occasional comment of an exceedingly caustic sort.

"Evidently not rigged up for anything strenuous to-day," thought the watching lad. "I wish somebody'd tackle you instead of that dummy. It would be fun to see you rolling——"

"What name?" sounded a sharp, authoritative voice beside him. "If you can't keep awake, Freshman, you'd better stay off the field."

The speaker was the tall, slim, immaculately garbed Bruce Cartwright, team manager and chum of Hornbrook's. He was standing with pencil poised, regarding Kingdon with a stare of impatient inquiry, as if he had never seen the new boy before and hadn't the least idea of his identity. To Rex, who only the day before had noticed Cartwright watching him intently, at the same time talking in a low tone to his friend

and room-mate, the pose seemed rather silly. Yet he was human enough to be a trifle annoyed.

"Well?" snapped Cartwright disagreeably. "If you've been suddenly struck dumb, nod your head and I'll go on to the next one. Of course the team would be hard hit, but we might manage to wriggle along without your assistance."

Rex flushed faintly under his tan, but he quickly pulled himself together and gave the required particulars of name, age, form and weight. He spoke in the soft, almost gentle voice that generally characterized his angry moments. Cartwright noted it all down with a negligence in itself insulting. As plainly as spoken words, his bearing indicated that he considered it merely as a matter of form, without entertaining the slightest belief in the possibilities of this particular candidate.

"Where've you played?" he asked indifferently at length.

"Quarter, usually."

"Humph! So far you're the fourth new kid who expects to play that position on the team. And we've already got two perfectly good quarterbacks from last year. You'll have to try for something else, if you expect to make even the

scrub." Then, as Rex made no comment, he shrugged his shoulders. "Well, get over there to Kester at the dummy, and we'll size you up later."

Still without comment, yet with every outward semblance of perfect amiability, Rex nodded and walked away across the turf. Experience had taught him that loss of temper and self-control was not only unpleasant but extremely futile. He had learned that the calmer and more placid he remained in a verbal altercation, the more likely was his opponent's temper to be irked. Therefore he frequently strove for that end, even when, as in the present case, he was really boiling inside.

"Lord High Cockahoop!" he grumbled as he turned his back to Cartwright. "Might think he ran the entire school. It's a beautiful case of enlarged cranium."

He made several other unflattering comments with vigor and feeling. But he had cooled considerably before he joined the group around the dangling dummy. His periods of irritation were never prolonged, and in the present instance keen interest in what lay ahead of him, helped to restore him swiftly to the normal.

It was his first experience with a dummy. He had learned tackling on the wriggling, squirming, elusive body of a fellow player, and he was curious to discover whether this method presented any more difficulties. He was speedily reassured. As well as he could observe, the process seemed easier, though, to be sure, the majority of candidates ahead of him failed to display any extraordinary brilliancy of the art. Now and again, a boy would plunge forward and catch the battered figure properly, but most of the fellows acted as if they were afraid to let themselves go. They were slow, nervous, inaccurate, and frequently lost hold on the dummy altogether, plowing humiliatingly over the grass on their faces and scrambling up awkwardly to the accompaniment of Beauty Kester's jeers.

The latter would have made an admirable slave driver. He had a harsh, deep voice and seemed to take great pleasure in hurling sarcasms on the heads of the unfortunate aspirants.

"Punk!" he would roar. "Oh, simply punk! You're not playing hunt the slipper, or any other cunning game. Get up and do it again. Don't be scared. It can't even slap you on the wrist. Take it on the jump, as if you meant something.



A little ginger, now, for the love of goodness!"

After this verbal assault, the unfortunate was almost certain to succeed in doing a little worse than before. Whereupon Kester, with another tongue lashing even more cutting than the first, dismissed him, humbled, and turned to the next man. His praise was rare. When he could not criticise justly, he either picked upon some insignificant or imaginary fault or pretended to be absorbed in something else, and let the perfect tackle pass unnoticed.

Rex watched and listened with amusement, tempered now and then by indignation. There is a certain type of fellow, perhaps, who can be stung to better things by such nagging, but the majority are likely to become more nervous and more incapable of decent work. Kingdon himself did fairly well the first time, but according to Kester, he should have taken rank at the very bottom of the line. His next effort was even better, but Kester criticized the precise manner in which he had struck the dummy. Then came a tackle which apparently passed unobserved.

"It'll have to do," said Kester when Rex questioned him. "I was looking at Phillips. Next!"

Kingdon smiled pleasantly with a touch of

skepticism, and took his place in the line. He had the trick of it now, and he wasn't going to let himself be bothered by anything Kester said. When his turn came again, he gathered himself for the spring, launched his lithe body forward and gripped the dummy accurately and firmly in what seemed to him like a very fair tackle. Before he could spring to his feet, however, he heard the critical voice of Hornbrook picking the performance to pieces.

"Is that the best you can show us, Freshman?" Wash inquired sarcastically, appearing suddenly near the apparatus. "I've been given to understand you amounted to quite some pumpkins at the game, but this looks as if we'd have to teach you the rudiments."

"What was wrong with it?" asked Rex, as he leaped to his feet.

"Everything," was the cutting retort. "You started too slowly, and both feet were off the ground for a second. You dropped your shoulders too much, and your grip was entirely too high. If you'd been tackling a player, instead of a dummy that couldn't get away, you wouldn't have held him for a minute. Suppose you try

again, and see if you can show us something like a real tackle."

Rex stepped back to the starting point. His jaw showed a bit hard and his lips were pressed tightly together. Facing the dummy, he shot a single glance at Hornbrook. Then, all at once, a curious expression of surprise, of silent questioning, of daring purpose flashed into his eyes.

Hornbrook had moved nearer the apparatus, as if to get a better view of the performance he evidently meant to criticize severely. Hands on his hips, legs spread a bit apart, head lifted, he stood there, the personification of arrogant power. The smooth black hair was still unruffled, and into Kingdon's active mind returned the wish he had been conscious of earlier in the afternoon. This time it was temptation—an almost irresistible temptation to tackle the boy instead of the dummy. A second he hesitated, held back by he knew not what. In that second Hornbrook spoke again, sharply and impatiently:

"We can't wait all day! Get busy now, and let's see a tackle that would take a man off his feet."

Kingdon's teeth clicked. He hesitated no longer. Gathering himself, he leaped forward.

Instead of plunging at the dangling, grotesque extremities of the dummy, he dived straight for the pair of very solid legs a few feet to the right, caught them in tight embrace, and brought their owner to the ground with a crushing impact.

## CHAPTER XV.

### BARRED FROM THE FIELD.

Even as they went down together, Kingdon was conscious of a startled gasp from the witnesses, accompanied by a sharp exclamation of angry surprise in Hornbrook's voice:

“Cut it out, you lunatic! What——”

Rex's momentum was considerable, and Hornbrook, caught unprepared, made no resistance. Wash plowed over the ground for a considerable distance before coming to a stop. And that ground was still rather wet and soggy from the two days of downpour.

As for Kingdon, he had scarcely yielded to the impulse before he regretted it. What he had done was inexcusable. No matter how irritating Hornbrook might make himself, he was still captain of the team, a person to be obeyed, and one whose comment and criticism, even if unjust and prejudiced, should be accepted without retort.

What Rex had done was foolish beyond words, and he sprang quickly to his feet, his face flushed with annoyance at his silliness. A second later, as his eyes fell on Hornbrook and he saw the damage he had done to the immaculate appearance of the captain, he caught his under lip between his teeth.

The unfortunate Hornbrook was muddy from head to feet. It covered one entire side of his moleskins, caked the canvas vest and utterly destroyed the dazzling freshness of the white sweater. It was even plastered in his hair—smooth and unruffled no longer; and a great smudge of it lay smeared across one cheek.

His face contorted by the fury that filled him, Wash bounced to his feet as if made of rubber. He sprang at Kingdon, launching a vicious blow straight at the face of the lad who had brought him to this unpleasant pass. Though taken a little by surprise, Rex ducked and parried instinctively. It was one thing to be sorry for a foolish action, quite another to take a public licking from a fellow he disliked. Again Hornbrook struck furiously at him, and this time Rex parried the blow in a manner which showed a little of his extraordinary skill at sparring. A second

later the older boy's hands dropped to his sides, and, moving back a step, he drew one sleeve of his jersey across his muddy cheek.

"You—you dog!" he snarled. His eyes blazed and his voice was hoarse. "You——"

Kingdon's eyes narrowed. "I wanted to show you that my tackle wasn't such a weak, ineffective piece of work as you seemed to imagine," he said. "You see it did manage to upset——"

"Get off the field!" grated Hornbrook savagely. "Get off—and stay off!"

For a fraction of time, so scant as to be barely noticeable, Rex hesitated, fixing the angry fellow with a glance that was level and unafraid. Not a sound came from the other boys, who, seeming bewildered and appalled by the enormity of the offense, stood about with gaping mouths, staring at the lad who had dared play such a trick on the autocrat of Walcott Hall. Rex smiled a little, shrugging his shoulders.

"Certainly," he returned quietly. "I suppose I ought to thank you for saving me a lot of work. The result would have been the same in the end, I'm told, under the present system and management."

Without waiting for a reply, he turned and



strolled away. Further down the field he paused for an instant to watch another batch of candidates passing the ball, and then he continued leisurely on up the slope toward the school.

Under the surface he was not nearly as cool and indifferent as he appeared. He had done an exceedingly foolish thing and had been properly punished. All the way up the hill he called himself numerous kinds of an idiot and indulged in a vast deal of miscellaneous mental castigation. He did not blame Hornbrook in the least for this particular display of his authority.

"He had to do it to preserve his rep," Rex muttered aloud. "In his place I'd have done exactly the same thing—except, of course, if I were in his place I wouldn't be running the team after his methods at all, and could quite properly turn off such a thing as this with a laugh. I s'pose there's no use crying over spilt milk, but I certainly deserve to be kicked."

Reaching the level, he passed around the chapel and through the opening in a low private hedge that bordered the walk between Old Hall and Fiske. At the door of the gymnasium he collided with Chip Hatfield, who, clad in flannels, racket in hand, was hastily emerging. They clutched

each other to avoid going down. Then Hatfield voiced his surprise:

"What the deuce are you doing here? I thought you were down——"

"So I was," returned Rex. "But I played the idiot with Hornbrook, and was shipped."

On hearing the details, the volatile Hatfield chuckled gleefully. "Lovely! Imagine the dignified Wash smeared up like that! I wish I'd seen it. These first few days he always does tog himself up so, I've often wished something——" He broke off abruptly, staring at Kingdon with reproof. "You have spilled the beans for fair this time," he went on accusingly. "Why on earth couldn't you have kept a check-rein on yourself when you knew how much depended on it?"

"I told you I'd made a fool of myself, but he looked so dolled up and ornamental I couldn't resist the temptation. I'm not sorry on his account. I wouldn't curry favor with him no matter what happened, but I did want to play football. However, there's no sense wasting any tears on what's over and done with. Got anybody to play with? If you'll wait till I change, I'll beat you a set of singles."

Hatfield accepted the challenge and went back into the gym while Rex got out of his football togs and into some flannels. Airy and optimistic, Chip never lingered long in a serious mood. Before they reached the courts, he was quite sure that Wash could be brought around, and that when he had cooled down, the combined influence of Phillips, Hatfield himself, and one or two others, would induce the captain to give Rex another chance.

"I won't say you'll stand much of a show to make the regular team," Chip admitted frankly. "But the scrub's not half bad fun. At least, a fellow gets the playing."

Rex was not so confident about making even the scrub, but he dismissed the subject from his mind and threw himself heart and soul into tennis. They finished playing three sets, and were so late at it, that they were barely through their showers before the gym was invaded by the football squad.

It was evident to Rex that the details of his offense had spread. No one spoke of it to him, but while dressing he was conscious of curious glances from different parts of the great room. Hornbrook and his crowd preserved an attitude

of studied indifference, apparently not even aware of the presence of the boy who had so offended. Phillips, a frown on his usually smiling face, was noticeably hustling, as if he meant to intercept Kingdon outside the gym. At least, that was how the freshman interpreted it. Being averse to a call-down just at the present moment, Rex hurried through his dressing and slipped away while his friend was under the shower.

Midkiff was already in the room, stripped to the waist and bending over the wash-bowl. As Rex entered he straightened, and bent a sour look upon the blond lad.

"Well," he sniffed, "I hear you've been making another fool of yourself down on the field."

Rex raised his eyebrows. "How do you come to be taking Hornbrook's part?" he inquired with some peevishness. "I didn't know you were so chummy with him as all that."

The big chap scowled. "I'm not chummy with him," he retorted. "I haven't a bit of use for him or his crowd. Just the same, if I wanted to play football the way you do, I'd certainly have more sense than go round playing kiddish tricks on the captain and getting him so down on me he'd never give me a show."

Kingdon reddened a bit. He had told himself precisely the same thing more than once this afternoon, but he did not enjoy hearing it in Midkiff's ill-tempered growl. About to reply rather curtly and end the discussion, he took notice of the splendid torso of the lad across the room, and his eyes widened with sudden speculation. He had observed those muscles frequently before and knew his room-mate to be exceptionally well-developed for his age; but until this moment the thought of connecting the Grouch with football had never occurred to him.

"Why don't *you* play football, Jawn?" he drawled meditatively. "With all that muscle, you ought to make a corking tackle or guard. Even Hornbrook would hardly dare to turn you down."

To his amazement Midkiff flushed deeply, stammered incoherently, and then, with a growl, turned abruptly to his washing again. He did not once resume the subject. In fact, all that evening he was even more uncommunicative than usual.

Rex came up late after supper, first being caught by Phillips and submitting with rather bad grace to the latter's lecture, to find his room-

mate deep in his studies. From that moment until close to ten he spoke but once in answer to a question from Kingdon about work. Rex determined to let him go his own sweet way and recover from this particular grouch without help.

Kingdon had finished his studies, read a chapter or two in an interesting book, and was beginning to yawn his head off, when a low, hurried knock brought him to his feet, surprised and curious. The moment he opened the door, young Pewee Hicks, breathing heavily, popped in and closed it hurriedly behind him.

"Sh!" he cautioned. "Thought I heard Simple Simon."

This being the euphonious nickname of Simon Levering, M. A., the master in charge of the corridor, Rex promptly turned the key, and for a few moments both boys stood with ears glued to the crack, listening intently for the slightest sound.

"False alarm, I guess," whispered Pewee at length. "Say!" His voice dropped another key or so and his sharp eyes roved suspiciously toward the studiously frowning Grouch. "You're wanted downstairs, old buck. Red sent me up

to say there was some fun on hand, and to be sure and come."

"Downstairs?" repeated Rex in a puzzled tone. "But where——"

"Out by the chapel door," explained the diminutive Hicks, fixing Kingdon with a bland and innocent stare. "I think they're going after apples. You know there's some corking ones over to Brown's. You're not scared to go, are you?" he asked, with a faint touch of sarcasm.

By way of answer Rex reached for his cap and unlocked the door. With a satisfied expression, Pewee poked his head out and reconnoitered. The corridor was dim and empty, and, with a nod to Rex, Hicks whisked out and disappeared in a second around the corner of a short passage leading to the stairs.

The room occupied by Kingdon and Midkiff—the last at the end of the corridor—was peculiarly adapted to secret excursions abroad, which were, of course, strictly forbidden. Between the chapel and the end of the main wing, a flight of stairs led directly down to an outer door opposite the end of the cloister. Half way down those stairs was a similar exit from the corridor on the second floor. Naturally, this outer door was always



kept locked at night, and, as they were taking the last turn in the stairs, Rex whispered a comment to that effect. Young Pewee sniffed contemptuously.

"Oh, slush!" he returned. "That don't worry *us*. We have keys to *all* the doors."

Rex chuckled under his breath at the tone, and they tip-toed across the brick pavement to the heavy oaken door. Massive as this was, it yielded to Pewee's push, and the two stepped out into the clear night.

At first Kingdon could see nothing of Phillips or any other boy. There was a low moon, and it threw the shadow of the bulking chapel far across the grass. Nowhere was there sound or sight of life, but before Rex could ask a question, Hicks took him by the sleeve.

"It's all right," he whispered, leading him down the shallow steps. "They're over here. Come ahead."

He led the way toward the chapel, which was Gothic in design, with massive flying buttresses projecting at intervals from the walls. As they reached the first of these, Pewee's grasp on the coat sleeve tightened perceptibly.

"He's here, fellows," he said with a touch of triumph. "I've got him all right."

There was a rush of feet. Dark figures leaped from the shelter of the buttresses—figures like ghosts of black men, showing from head to foot no touch of relieving white. They surrounded Rex, gripping his arms as in a vise, and shoved him irresistibly along around the curving wall of the brick chapel.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE HAZING.

Rex's first impulse was to struggle. He even hardened his muscles instinctively in the beginning of an effort to break away. Then he realized that such an effort was not only hopeless but rather foolish. He could scarcely escape from the six or seven sturdy, well-built fellows who held him, and, after all, he wasn't sure that he wanted to. They were bent on hazing him, of course, and the more readily he submitted, the sooner it would be over.

Hazing at Walcott Hall, so Rex had been told, consisted merely in making the new boys sing songs, recite, or go through some ridiculous but harmless trick. The more disagreeable and really cruel things were not tolerated for an instant by Dr. Tillinghast, who had made the penalties severe enough to be deterring. Consequently, being of a philosophic turn of mind and having a

nature that did not shrink from doing "stunts" before an audience, Rex abandoned all thoughts of resistance. He even derived some entertainment from the nature of the affair.

His captors did not take him far. Rounding the massive chancel end of the chapel, they came into a patch of moonlight that was hidden from the observation of any one in the rooms of Old Hall by the bulking roof and pillars of the cloister. Here they paused while a brief, whispered conference went on between several of the fellows, each one of whom, Rex observed, wore over his face a piece of black stuff that made the most effective disguise. When this conference ceased, one of them straightened suddenly and waved his hand.

"Bring forth the halter," he commanded somewhat grandiloquently, and in a palpably disguised voice. "Perchance the animal may balk."

"That's Hornbrook," thought Rex, struck by a slightly familiar intonation. "The lanky one beside him must be Cartwright. I wonder which is Red?"

His glance, shifting swiftly over the remainder of the group, found no figure that seemed like Phillips, with his big frame and uncommonly

broad shoulders. Somehow, the discovery brought with it the first twinge of doubt and foreboding Kingdon had experienced. No matter how easy-going he was, Red could always be counted on to see fair play. But with him absent, and only Hornbrook's intimates and satellites about, Rex perceived unpleasant possibilities. He could not help remembering Hornbrook's fury of that afternoon, and he wondered if this little party might not be in the nature of retaliation. Again the impulse came to strike out and escape. This time it was quelled by the fear that such a move would look like cowardice.

"I won't give any of 'em the chance to say I'm afraid," he said under his breath, with an involuntary squaring of the shoulders. "I guess I can stand as much as the next chap without squealing."

One of the boys produced a rope. Under Hornbrook's instruction it was fastened firmly to Kingdon's left ankle.

"Just to make sure he doesn't do any damage with those big hoofs of his," remarked the joker blandly. "Give me the end. That's right. We have with us to-night, gentlemen," he went on in an oracular tone, "Jocko, the most wonderful

trained mule in captivity. I may say he is the only mule in the world instructed in the great American game of football. He has been secured to-night at great expense to give you an exhibition of his extraordinary talents. Is there a football present? I see there is. Now, Jocko, suppose you show us what you can do in the way of falling on that ball."

Rex did not immediately comply with the request. Someone had thrust an inflated pigskin into the circle, and it lay on the turf. Apparently it was much the same as any other pigskin, and in a good position, yet the boy had a notion he would never be allowed to touch it. His hesitation, however, was only momentary. No matter what happened, he would not be called a quitter by Wash Hornbrook or any other of this bunch of jokers. Drawing a quick breath, he flung himself suddenly at the ball. As he had expected, it was even more swiftly jerked out of reach by the invisible string that intuition had told him was attached to it.

"Poor! Oh, very poor!" came in Hornbrook's mocking voice. "You never made your rep on such work as that, Jocko. Again, now, and on the jump this time. Put a little life into it."

Without protest or comment of any sort, Rex plunged after the elusive ball half a dozen times before the fellow who operated the string was caught napping. At once Hornbrook abandoned that form of entertainment for another.

"Evidently not up to the mark to-night, Jocko," he drawled. This time, having forgotten his early attempt to disguise his voice, he spoke quite naturally. "Suppose we have a little kicking. Possibly you may do better at that."

Though somewhat sore on elbows and thighs from unpadded contact with the hard ground, Rex obeyed. Of course, the ball was jerked away before his foot touched it. Nevertheless, he went through the motions several times, to the great amusement of the onlookers, the most of whom were by this time convulsed with mirth. Indeed, Beauty Kester's characteristic guffaw had long ago betrayed him, and Rex now had no trouble in identifying the shrill falsetto of Splinter Benkard.

"Too low, and much to the right," criticized Hornbrook. "Even if this is your off-night, Jocko, do show a little ginger. We'll try again. On the jump, now!"

Kingdon's lips were pressed together; his eyes



narrowed a bit. He was growing decidedly weary of the business, yet before he stopped he did want to make connections just once with that pigskin. Hoping to catch the fellow unawares, he gathered himself and kicked out suddenly with a good deal of force. 'The result was as disagreeable as it was unexpected. As Kingdon's right foot left the ground, Hornbrook jerked sharply on the rope fastened to his left ankle, and the boy crashed heavily on his face with force which jarred the breath out of him.

The mirth that followed this exhibition did not seem as pronounced as usual. Hornbrook was vastly diverted, and Cartwright and Kester both laughed delightedly. But the others remained more or less silent. Rex rose slowly to his feet and stood with head bent slightly forward, his hands clenched, fighting for self-control.

"Stubbed your toe?" queried Hornbrook with mock solicitude. "Too bad! You should be careful about that and not let it happen again."

"It won't, don't worry," returned Kingdon grimly.

"N-o?" There was a note of challenge in the

joker's voice. "I'm glad you're so sure. Next time——"

"There won't be any next time," cut in Rex. Detecting the curt seriousness in his own voice, he added more lightly: "Kicking isn't my strong suit, you know. Why not let me show you some tackling? I'm not half bad at that. Perhaps you recall this afternoon——"

"This afternoon gave us all we wanted of that sort of thing." Temper was plainly manifest in Hornbrook's tone, and Rex decided that, like the majority of practical jokers, he didn't bear up at all well when ridicule was turned against himself. "You'll have all the tackling you want later. We're going to let you play the dummy. Just now kicking is what interests us. We're waiting to see some more of that."

"Yes," suddenly added Cartwright harshly. "And you'll stand up there and do as you're told, Freshie, or it'll be the worse for you."

Taking a step forward, he thrust his face, covered by the shapeless black mask, close to Rex's with a pugnacious movement that was an irresistible temptation to the blond lad. With sudden agility the latter bent forward and twitched

the masks from the faces of both Hornbrook and Cartwright.

"There!" he said. "Now you can see much better when you start making me do as I'm told. Might as well show your mug, too, Kester. This is the first time I've noticed excessive modesty in either you or Benkard."

The faces of Hornbrook and his chum were filled with mingled surprise and fury. Kester had taken a step forward, his pose oddly eloquent of blank amazement. The others stood motionless, staring through the narrow slits in the black cambric.

"You—you——" gasped Cartwright at length.

"Jump on him, fellows!" cut in Hornbrook's sudden sharp command. "Pile on him quick, and we'll tie him up so——"

Without finishing the sentence, he flung himself back on the rope with so much force and abruptness that, prepared as he was for such a move, Rex was snapped off his feet. Prone on the ground, he struggled fiercely against the boys who leaped on him. But the odds were too great. With a fellow holding each hand and foot and several left over to sit upon various parts of his

person, Rex was finally forced to succumb to numbers.

"Somebody stick a handkerchief over his mouth and tie it there," ordered Hornbrook in a sharp whisper. "Tie his feet together, Bruce, while I fix his hands."

When they attempted to fasten a wadded bunch of linen over Kingdon's mouth he began to struggle again. But soon he gave it up. A fellow who rarely lost his temper, he was now in the grip of cold fury, but still reasonable enough to understand how impossible it was to escape unaided. Filled with helpless rage at the humiliation, he felt ropes tightened around his ankles and wrists.

"Cowards!" he mumbled behind the gag. "I'll get you yet for this! You'll settle in full!"

"Over to the hedge, now!" Hornbrook directed a moment later. "We'll show this fresh piece of cheese that his particular brand of humor isn't appreciated around here."

In a momentary pause Rex became aware of a whispered protest from one or more of the party. He could not hear the words, but the tones were as unmistakable as Hornbrook's tart rejoinder:

"What are *you* afraid of? He hasn't spotted

your phiz yet. Don't be a jellyfish! Pick him up and come on."

Rex was quickly lifted by four boys, who carried him round the chapel again, past the tower door and onward to the private hedge that bordered a narrow flagged walk which ran from Old Hall to Fiske. Up to this moment Kingdon had not had the least idea what they meant to do with him. However, as he was dropped on the grass and the fellows gathered around Hornbrook for a brief whispered consultation, a sudden light flashed upon him.

"The hedge!" he muttered. "Great guns! They mean to—— Why, I thought that was cut out long ago."

He had remembered Red Phillips' account of a famous hazing stunt which had been in vogue away back in the early days when students were publicly whipped and many brutalities countenanced, or at least not forbidden. In those days there had existed an absurd notion that such treatment tended, in some fashion, to make a boy more manly.

This particular stunt was called "Giving Him the Hedge," or, more simply, "The Hedge." It consisted merely in trussing a boy up and toss-

ing him back and forth across this very hedge as many times as the unfortunate victim, in the judgment of his tormentors, could stand it without broken bones or a fractured skull. As the hedge, though not more than three feet high, was very broad, and on one side the victim's flight through the air was sometimes stopped by nothing softer than a flagged walk, the possibility of serious injury was not as remote as it might seem.

Of course such brutality had long since been abolished, but the tradition survived, as such traditions will, to be retailed to obstreperous freshmen as a reminder of what would have been meted out to them had they entered Walcott Hall years before. There were numerous yarns of broken arms, legs and collar-bones, and all sorts of dislocations, which lost nothing of gruesome value through years of repetition. Some of the more graphic of these tales flashed through Kingdon's mind, making him shiver a bit. Cold-bloodedly to consider physical hurt with equanimity is at no time easy. When a chap is more or less of an athlete, and knows that a broken bone may put him out of business for months,

and may perhaps become a permanent disability, it is even harder.

That was the threatening danger that stung Rex and made him twist and squirm and try to utter a protest. The gag prevented that. Then the hazers, bending over him, stilled his movements and caused him to clamp his teeth together with determination. They might kill him, he told himself with jaws stubbornly set, but they couldn't make him beg for mercy.

Under the directions of Hornbrook, who evidently scorned to resume his mask, Rex was lifted. Two fellows had him by the shoulders and two more by the feet.

"Swing him a few times," whispered Hornbrook. "We want to get up some speed. That's it. Now—go!"

Suddenly released, Rex went sailing over the broad hedge. It seemed to him as if he went up a mile before beginning to drop, and the process of falling was even worse. He landed on the turf and bounced upon the walk with a jolt that nearly knocked the wind out of him. Instantly he was picked up by the boys on that side of the hedge and tossed over again.

He soon lost track of the number of his flights



through the air. His brain whirled, and every inch of his body seemed covered with bruises. Instinctively he sought to prevent his head from cracking down on the flagging when he bounced upon it. And from beginning to end not a sound passed his lips. Even when he felt his senses swimming he clamped his jaws tighter for fear he might betray himself by a muffled groan.

He had landed on the turf and been caught up and swung for a "return passage," as Cartwright had cynically termed it a few minutes before. Dazed as he was, he seemed to know by instinct that this time he would fall full upon the flag walk. Every nerve in his bruised body shrank from it. Once, twice, they swung him. Suddenly the voice of Pewee Hicks, sharp and high-pitched with alarm, hissed out a warning:

"Cheese it quick, fellows! Somebody's coming!"

The four boys who were swinging Kingdon loosed their holds unevenly, and the lad flew erratically across the hedge and struck the hard pavement full on his shoulders. Then everything winked out.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### A SHOCK FOR MR. TOPPING.

It was more like a wink than most lapses from consciousness. To Rex it seemed as if he had merely closed his eyes for a second and opened them again. He heard the hurried yet stealthy rush of his tormentors for the tower door and the faint creaking of its hinges as it was yanked open. He was still dazed, and not until the clicking footfalls of someone advancing briskly along the flagged walk came unmistakably to his ears, did he give a thought to the person who had broken in upon the hazing party.

Rex was grateful to the unknown who had brought about the welcome interruption. The footsteps came on quickly. Lying on his back in the middle of the walk, the boy decided it was one of the masters returning from the village. A tall, lanky figure came through the opening in the hedge, turned toward Fiske Hall and then stopped, with a sharp intake of startled surprise,

which was followed swiftly by an even sharper command:

“What nonsense is this? Get up instantly!”

It was Mr. Topping. Unable to reply by word or gesture, Rex stared up into the shadowy face of the master with a premonition of approaching unpleasantness. His inexplicable silence added to the man’s irritation.

“Get up at once!” the latter persisted frigidly. “Your behavior is insolent! If I am not instantly obeyed——”

He stooped to grasp a shoulder of the recumbent figure, and his hand brushed against the gag. He recoiled with a sharp exclamation.

“Scared!” thought the boy derisively. “He hasn’t any more nerve than a rabbit.”

After a moment or two of indecision, the master bent down again and fumbled awkwardly at the gag. His fingers encountered the knot. After what seemed a most prolonged delay, the handkerchief was pulled from Kingdon’s mouth and he was able to speak.

“Much obliged, sir,” he said with relief that he was not altogether successful in hiding under an almost flippant manner. “That’s a lot more com-

fortable. If you will take your knife and cut the rope around my wrists I'll be all right."

He rolled over, bringing his wrists uppermost. Without comment, Mr. Topping severed the strands. Having freed his own ankles, Rex started to leap up lightly and agilely. He had forgotten his bruises, however, and the length of time he had been trussed up. Instead of doing the thing gracefully, he staggered painfully and would have fallen only for the sustaining arm the master put forth.

"Are you hurt?" the latter asked hurriedly, with what seemed like a touch of anxiety.

"Cramps," stammered Rex. "I—I'm sorry, but I'll be all right in a minute, sir."

Stamping vigorously, he presently had the circulation restored in his cramped legs, and was able to walk. They had moved forward a step or two into a patch of moonlight. Glancing at his silent companion, the boy discovered that the tutor had resumed his customary stiff composure and was regarding him with an expression of severe suspicion.

"When you have entirely recovered, Kingdon," said the man presently in his curt, sharp manner,

"perhaps you will give me an explanation of this extraordinary business."

Rex hesitated, flushing a little in spite of his determination to carry it off lightly. "It was a—er—joke," he returned rather weakly at last.

"Indeed!" sniffed Mr. Topping. "A somewhat perverted sense of humor, I should say. Well, who were the perpetrators? You scarcely expect me to believe that you tied yourself up, put a gag in your own mouth and lay down here for the sole purpose of frightening me?"

"No, sir."

"Then who else was mixed up in it?"

"I'm afraid I can't tell you, sir."

"Humph!" snorted the master, his eyes narrowing. "You understand the alternative? I shall be obliged to report you to Dr. Tillinghast as having been out of the buildings at a quarter to eleven at night. You know, or ought to know, the stringent rules against it."

"Wouldn't you have done that anyway, sir?" questioned Rex sweetly.

The master frowned. "That will do! Return to your room at once and be prepared to explain your actions to the head master to-morrow morning."

With an angry jerk of his head he turned, and walked on in the direction of Fiske Hall. Rex stared doubtfully after him before whirling and running noiselessly toward the tower door. For some inexplicable reason, Snoopy had failed to ask him how he got out of the building. Kingdon was not only afraid he might realize his emission and return, but he was also extremely curious to know whether that method of ingress was still open to him. If one of the hazing party had locked the door and carried off the key, he would be in a distinctly embarrassing position.

He was relieved when the door yielded to his touch. Entering hastily, he was surprised to find the key still in the lock. Evidently the retreat had been even more hurried than he had supposed. Having locked the door, however, Rex put the key into his pocket and lost no time ascending the stairs.

His room was dark when he crept in, but Midkiff's voice sounded immediately from his corner:

"Nice time of night to be coming in! Repeat that stunt a few times and you'll be brought up sharp by the chief. Don't light the gas, now. If you can't come to bed at the proper time, you can undress in the dark."

"Don't worry, Jawn," drawled Rex. "That's precisely what I mean to do. I've had such a lovely time, John!" he added, feeling his way across the room. "Wouldn't you like to hear about it?"

"No, I wouldn't!" retorted Midkiff gruffly. "For goodness' sake, dry up and get to bed! I've been kept awake long enough as it is, without listening to any more gas from you."

Smiling in the darkness, Kingdon began to strip off his clothes. Each movement made him conscious of a new bruise. "I'll look like a spotted leopard in the morning," he thought whimsically.

He put on his pajamas and was crawling into bed when he slipped and struck a particularly sore portion of his anatomy against the iron side-piece. The result was an involuntary gasp of pain that brought a swift comment from the Grouch:

"What in thunder are you groaning like that for?"

Rex stretched himself creakily at full length and drew the covers up to his chin. "That wasn't a groan, Jawn," he murmured. "It was a sigh of content. I was thinking how simply heavenly this mattress would be if only the stuffer had



left out a lot of hard, bumpy things like golf balls or door knobs or miniature boulders. I s'pose, though, it wouldn't be good for us to be too comfortable. Eh, what?"

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### WHO TOLD?

Before breakfast was over next morning, a vague undercurrent of excitement showed itself in various parts of the great dining room. If anyone knew just what it was all about, he kept it to himself. Nevertheless, rumors began to float around that something unusual had happened the night before. It was whispered that somebody had been caught doing something or other that was sure to bring down the wrath of "Tilly"—as the head master was occasionally called by the boys—upon the head of the perpetrator.

Immediately after chapel, Rex Kingdon was summoned to Dr. Tillinghast's office. An excited buzz swept over the schoolroom, which even Mr. Levering, who had charge that morning, found difficulty in quelling. Questions were asked and unanswered; theories of all sorts were evolved.

Eager eyes were riveted on the door, and those who had an early recitation dawdled through the halls, risking a late mark in hopes of encountering the interesting freshman returning from the office. Hornbrook and his crowd made no comment, but their affectation of nonchalance and unconcern was overdone and excited suspicion on the part of several alert youngsters who were not in the secret.

It was fully ten minutes after the roll had been called when Rex quietly entered Mr. Topping's class room and took his seat on a rear bench between Chip Hatfield and a plump chap named Darby. Both youths bent hastily toward him, the same question trembling on their lips. Before they could whisper a word the master's sharp voice broke the stillness:

"Well, Kingdon?"

"Detained in the office, sir," explained Rex.

Mr. Topping made a mark in his book. "Very well. You may step to the board and demonstrate the tenth problem."

Hatfield and Darby sat back and regarded the master reproachfully. With alacrity that belied his real feelings, Rex joined the boys who were already at the blackboard.

"Still got it in for me, I see," he muttered. "Enjoy yourself, old boy!"

It was the third time in succession that he had been called on by Mr. Topping to recite, and he was growing tired of what he considered a clear case of malice. Up to the present he had been prepared, just because he did not wish to give the man the satisfaction of catching him napping. To-day, also, he managed to get through his problem, but it took him the entire period, and he left the classroom with a more unfavorable opinion than ever of the unpopular master.

Outside, he was grabbed by three or four boys at once, all of whom demanded in tones shrill with eagerness to know what had been the cause for his summons to the doctor's office. Wincing, for Darby had roughly grasped a most tender spot on one shoulder, Rex slid out of their hold and threw up both arms in an exaggerated attitude of self-defense.

"Keep your paws off!" he commanded. "The next fellow who grabs me like that 's going to get a jolt. You're as curious as a lot of old women."

"But what did he want, King?" besought one of the boys. "Tell us, can't you?"

Kingdon grinned. "Why, sure, when you ask so cutely as that, Reynolds. The doctor wanted my advice on a matter of grea-a-a-ate importance. He's noticed that Darby's getting fatter by the minute and won't exercise. He wanted me to use my influence——"

He dodged to escape the irritated Darby, who was extremely sensitive about his weight. Rex fled down the corridor. There was quite a crowd in the square hall outside the schoolroom, but he slid through them and stopped on the far side, where he was presently joined by Hatfield.

"I must have missed a trick last night, old man," commented Chip, drawing Kingdon's arm through his own. "They put you through your paces, didn't they? Tell us about it. I can't get a peep out of Wash, or any of the rest. They're like a lot of clams."

After a slight hesitation, Rex shrugged his shoulders. Hatfield was trustworthy, and there seemed no reason why he shouldn't know what had happened. Having so decided, Kingdon launched into a low-voiced account which, light and whimsical as he took care to make it, soon had Chip's eyes bulging.

"The hedge!" he exclaimed in an astonished

whisper. "They gave you the hedge? Jingo! Wash has more nerve than I thought he had. Why, if that was found out—— Say, what in thunder did you tell Tilly?"

"Hornbrook's on probation!" shrilled a passing small boy excitedly. "So's Kester and——"

Hatfield reached out and gripped his arm. "What are you talking about, you shrimp?" he demanded. "What's that you said?"

The boy wriggled out of his grasp. "I said Wash is on probation," he retorted, dancing out of reach. "So are a lot more. It's just been posted on the bulletin board."

Hatfield straightened up and looked queerly at Kingdon. "Let's go over and take a squint at that board," he proposed in an odd tone.

In silence, the two boys made their way across the square hall to a central pillar that held a heavy-framed board which was covered by various notices emanating from both the faculty and the students themselves. Notices of athletic meetings and of practice hours, official communications, notes from one boy to another, losts and founds—all were jumbled together. It is probable that nearly every boy in school examined the board at least twice a day to see if he could dis-

cover anything of personal interest to him. At present there seemed to be something on the board that interested everybody. There was a jam around the pillar, and the sound of many voices filled the hall with a shrill, excited buzz.

Followed by Rex, Hatfield pushed his way through the throng and reached the board. Exactly in the middle, and covering a number of smaller screeds by its amplitude, was a sheet of official stationery bearing a curt announcement:

"The following students are hereby placed on probation for one week, beginning with to-day at 8:30 A. M.: W. Hornbrook, B. Cartwright, J. Kester, H. Benkard, C. Davis.

(Signed)

"H. W. TILLINGHAST,

"Head Master."

Having read the lines through twice, Hatfield turned slowly and looked at his companion. His lids drooped a little, and his customary expression of careless good humor had given place to one of surprised contempt.

"So that *was* it!" he said cuttingly. "You told, did you? I'd have sworn you weren't that sort. This shows that you can never judge by appearances."



If he expected the freshman to show signs of embarrassment, he was disappointed. Kingdon met him with a calm and level gaze that was a little cold, perhaps, but without the slightest symptom of regret or shame.

"Quite a wiz at character reading, aren't you?" he said with a touch of sarcasm. "You've got 'em all beaten in that line, Hat!"

Paying no further attention to the chap, he walked toward the schoolroom, intending to leave his algebra and get the books for the next recitation. He had taken but a few steps, however, before a hiss arose from the group around the bulletin board and swept down the hall, gathering volume.

"Sneak!"

"Telltale!"

"Squealer!"

A touch of color crept up from Kingdon's well-fitting collar and lost itself in the crisp waves of his blond hair. But not a facial muscle quivered. Having entered the schoolroom, he walked back to his desk with perfect self-possession, his expression as bland and inscrutable as that of the marble bust of Cæsar perched on a bracket above the master's platform.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE GROUCH.

However well he may have concealed his feelings, Rex Kingdon had rarely if ever passed a more thoroughly uncomfortable two hours. The placing on probation of three of the principal members of the football organization was regarded by the majority of the boys in the light of a catastrophe. During that week the delinquents, strictly forbidden to take part in any athletic games, were required to keep "within bounds," which did not extend beyond the plateau on which stood the school buildings. They would be unable to drill or coach the squad. A whole week of the none too generous time for preparation would be practically lost.

For this Kingdon seemed to be blamed by the majority of the boys. Hornbrook and the rest had evidently been thorough in spreading their version of the story. The very fact that so many

accepted that version as true, without even giving Rex a chance at denial or explanation, roused in him a stubborn determination to keep his own tongue between his teeth. However, he was not sorry when twelve o'clock came, bringing a study period that allowed him to get off for a time by himself.

He went straight to his room, where he lost no time in stripping to the waist and getting out some healing salve to put on the worst of the bruises. On rising in the morning he had been so anxious to keep his room-mate from "getting wise" that he hadn't obtained even a glimpse of himself in the mirror. What met his gaze now as he squinted through a handglass at the reflection of his back appeared even worse than he had expected.

"Great guns!" he muttered, surveying the display of blue, green and saffron-rimmed blotches. "The tattooed man of a circus! Look at the lovely pictures! Hope that shoulder isn't going to develop into anything worse."

It was a bad looking bruise, although the skin was not quite broken. He was awkwardly endeavoring to rub salve on the spot when the door was suddenly opened by Midkiff. The Grouch

was breathing a bit unevenly, as if he had been taking the two flights of stairs on the run. As he closed the door he gave a quick gasp, after which for a moment not a sound broke the stillness of the room.

"Who did that to you?"

The harsh utterance held an undercurrent of cold fury Rex could not understand. He turned with a rather feeble attempt at evasive pleasantry, but his voice faltered and died away before the expression on Midkiff's face.

"You needn't tell me. I know!" rasped the latter, taking a swift step forward. "It happened last night. The curs! If I'd known. Here, let me see it."

With unexpected gentleness, he turned Kingdon's bruised back to the light and gazed at it. There was another breathless silence. Rex stole a glance into the mirror and swiftly looked away again. He had caught only a glimpse of the Grouch's face, but that glimpse had shown him a little quiver in the firm lips and a glint of something bright in the dark eyes. It turned Kingdon red with embarrassment. The revelation was bewildering, and he could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses. Thinking of Midkiff's de-

meanor last night, this morning, and from the first moment of their acquaintance, he could not reconcile it with this.

"The curs!" repeated the big chap harshly. "They ought to be thrashed within an inch of their lives! Why didn't you tell the doctor about them? He'd settle their hash."

"Most of the fellows seem to think I did tell," returned Rex. "How's it happen that you——"

"Don't be a fool!" cut in Midkiff. "What's that stuff you're using? Not much good, but better than nothing, I suppose. Give it here. Now don't jump when it begins to sting."

He took the jar in his big hands and began, with a deft gentleness Kingdon would not have thought possible, to lay on the ointment smoothly and evenly. After watching him in the glass for a moment or two, Rex remarked:

"I don't see why you say you wish I'd squealed on them. You wouldn't have done such a thing yourself."

"Wouldn't I?" retorted Midkiff viciously. "Just give me a chance, and see! I've no compunction with a crowd that would do a dirty thing like—— Come in! Don't stop to knock!

"This is a public reception room, of course. Visitors welcome at all hours."

"How sociable you are, Mid!" said Red Phillips, slamming the door behind him. "I didn't know you were so private. Great cats and little kittens!" he ejaculated, staring at Rex's back. "That's fierce!" His jaws clicked shut and his eyes snapped. "So that's the result of their little hazing stunt, is it? I thumb-screwed it out of Kester just now that they had you out last night and gave you the hedge a couple of times. A couple! It must have been about fifty. If I don't get after Wash Hornbrook and——"

"Don't go off your nut, Red," advised Rex calmly. "It's my funeral, you know, and when I square up with Hornbrook it won't be by anything so crude as licking him. In the meantime he's got his from Tilly, hasn't he?"

"I suppose so—after a fashion," agreed Phillips. "He should have got a month, though, instead of only a week. How do you think the old man got wise?"

Rex smiled. "Don't you accept the prevailing explanation, either?"

"That you hollered? Bah! I told Wash it was rot, and that he'd better consult his intelli-

gence before going ahead to spread that nonsense. Even if a fellow didn't know you weren't the sort to play the sneak, anyone but a born fool could tell by the length of their probation that Tilly knew nothing about the hedge. If he had, he'd have given 'em the whole term—maybe fired them. What did you say to him, anyhow?"

"Told him they made me do foolish football stunts. Which was true."

"Didn't give names, of course?"

"No, and he didn't press me very hard, either, which I thought was rather queer at the time."

"Not specially. Tilly doesn't care much for a tell-tale. S'pose he asks just because he thinks he ought. That explains the week, of course. It's the regular penalty for being caught out at night. But who reported them? It was Snoopy who let you loose, wasn't it? That's what Beauty thought. He was watching through his window after they got back to the corridor. Snoopy couldn't have seen any of them, could he?"

Rex shook his head. "Hardly. He didn't show up till long after they beat it. How about Simple Simon?"

"Beaut said they saw nothing of him when they went back. If he'd seen them he'd likely



have showed himself, I should think." Phillips' perplexed frown suddenly gave way to the old grin. "Well, however it came about, it's done me a good turn. Since he can't go down to the field himself, Wash has put me in charge of the squads for the week. I ought to get some fun out of that. Eh, what?"

Rex agreed and reached for his shirt. "Much obliged, John," he said as he pulled the garment over his head. "Feels better already."

Midkiff made no reply. Setting the ointment precisely on the bureau, he turned to Phillips. "If you had any sense at all," he growled, "you'd get more than fun out of it."

Phillips laughed. "Passing over your cloying flattery, Mid—you're such an effusive duck!—if you've got anything to suggest that would add to the gayety of nations, suppose you let it come. We'll assume that you were given sole authority for a week over the football squads. What would be your first move?"

"Run Kingdon in as quarter on the Second Eleven—or maybe the First."

Both boys gasped; then they stared questioningly at one another. Finally Phillips turned back to Midkiff.

"Now and then you do hit the little black circle, Middy, right in the center." Throwing back his head, he roared without restraint. "Can't you see Wash and cunning Bruce, Rex?" he cried. "They'd have convulsions, and yet they'd have to stand for it because they've given me full charge."

"They'd grab it away from you in no time," declared Kingdon.

"Can't," said Red laconically. "I've been invested with power in solemn conclave, and without taking the matter to Tilly they can't kick me out until the week is up. It's one of the funny rules that govern athletics here, handed down, I suppose, from generations back. The captain of the second has full power to make up his team and run it to suit himself without interference from the regular captain. Of course he's appointed by the captain and has to do as he says about practice games and all that. Also, if one of his men are wanted for the first he has to let him go. Aside from that, he's pretty much his own boss."

"I suppose that works up a regular team spirit that should strengthen the scrub a lot," commented Rex. "It's not half as crazy as it sounds,

first off. Still, I reckon you'd better not try anything like that, old man. You'd get in bad with Hornbrook and might make a lot of trouble for yourself, later."

Phillips thrust out his jaw pugnaciously. "That's my lookout. I guess I can hold my own with Wash Hornbrook, for all of his influence in the school. Would you come out for practice this aft if I asked you?"

"Would a starving man eat?" asked Rex.

"Then, Mister Rexford Kingdon," said the red-headed chap with mock seriousness, "you are hereby requested to array your sylphlike figure in the proper garb and present yourself on the field of battle at the witching hour of three P. M."

"And heaven have mercy on your soul!" added Midkiff with a touch of grim and entirely unexpected humor.

## CHAPTER XX.

### TAKING UP THE GAUNTLET.

Descending to dinner, Rex found the atmosphere extremely chilly. Hornbrook had done his work well, and the fellows who did not greet the supposedly erring freshman with biting comments or the chill silence of deliberately turned backs, were of the minority.

An hour before, Kingdon's cool indifference had been assumed to hide the hurt and indignation such treatment roused in him. Now his indifference was genuine. He had gained two allies, both of them rather unexpected, and the certainty of winning more fellows over to his side made him utterly careless of present slights. Hornbrook had thrown down the gauntlet, and the new boy was not in the least averse to picking it up.

"Wait a week and see how things stand then," he said to himself, smiling a little at an espe-

cially scathing glance cast by Hornbrook from the adjacent table.

The morning mail had brought a small, square, carefully wrapped package, which Rex received at first with surprise. Then he saw upon it the name of a firm of Boston jewelers, and smiled. It must be the pins for the burlesque secret society, which he had ordered the day after arriving at school. He hadn't expected them to make such a quick job of it. When dinner was over, he strolled off by himself and made haste to open the package.

For an inexpensive thing, the pin had been effectively gotten up. It was merely a diamond-shaped bit of black enamel on a plated shield, bearing on its surface the Greek letters Delta Tau Chi. There really should have been another tau, as Lane and Kingdon had humorously chosen the motto, "Death to the Clan," for the name, and adopted the Greek letters to give a touch of impressiveness to the effect. But Rex had never heard of a genuine Greek letter fraternity with four initial letters, so they decided to drop one.

"Niftiest thing I've ever seen for a fake," murmured Rex, stowing the box away in his pocket. "You'd think it was sure enough gold, instead

of brass washed over. If these don't create some sensation about here when they shine forth on fellows' vests, I'll eat my boot-taps."

There was no time to go ahead with the matter at once. Rex did not wish the fact that he would be on the field that afternoon to leak out beforehand. Consequently he hastened to remove his football togs from the gym to his own room, where he could dress without arousing general comment. When the afternoon study hour was over, he slipped up and changed, leaving the building by the tower door without encountering anyone save a group of youngsters skylarking in the open space between Old Hall and Fiske.

He was almost the first to reach the field, and it was amusing to observe the expressions of the various arriving players as they recognized him. They were all surprised, but some, as Phillips expressed it, were "more so." A few did not hesitate to utter in his hearing scathing comments on a certain person's nerve in showing up after what had happened—both yesterday and this morning. Garry Lane was the only one of any importance who spoke to Rex. Even he, though he did his best to hide it, was ill at ease.

"The pins have come, and they're corkers,"

Rex informed him, as much to avoid football talk as anything. "Come up to the Divide after practice and look them over."

Lane readily agreed. "Are you going to play to-day?" he asked after a moment's pause.

Kingdon nodded. "Red's got charge, you know, and he's asked me to come out. I'm going to try and make the Second."

"By George! I hope you do!" Garry's face lit up and there was no doubting the sincerity of his delight. "It would be corking if—— Still, I don't suppose Wash will come around, will he?"

"No telling," laughed Rex. "Maybe I'll be such a star performer he'll have to keep me."

Certainly there's many a true word spoken in jest, or with an appearance of jesting. Kingdon may not have planned to exert himself for the purpose of impressing Wash Hornbrook, but it had been in his mind from the start that here was his chance, and the only chance he was likely to have, of showing to the school at large something of his ability as a player. He was not one to fail in making the most of his opportunity. When Phillips presently started things going, which he did in a noticeably brisker and more



businesslike manner than Hornbrook had shown the day before, Rex sailed in to make a reputation.

Under the surface manner of careless, joking irresponsibility, Phillips possessed the rare talent of leadership to an uncommon degree. He knew how to extract the utmost amount of work from a person. His methods were the direct antithesis of Hornbrook's. He tackled a bunch of candidates in his easy, jovial manner, jollying this one, subtly praising that, exciting a little rivalry in the brain of a third. Within a few minutes, he had them all galvanized into enthusiasm.

He put Rex in with the rest, neither favoring him unduly nor hampering him as Hornbrook had done. The work was much the same as before, tackling, passing, punting, falling on the ball, with a little special coaching of the ends and backs. But during the last half hour of daylight, Red sprang an innovation. Out of last year's men and substitutes he formed a regular team, and the most promising of the horde of applicants made up another. Until the falling dusk forced him to call a halt, he kept the two surging up and down the field in a series of rushes

that stirred the blood and brought a sparkle to many eyes.

Of course it was necessarily very crude. Many of the fellows, especially in the Second Eleven, did not know how to play their places. The quarterbacks, having no signals, simply called out the plays for all to hear. Nevertheless, the idea seemed to be popular with all save a few of Hornbrook's particular circle of intimates.

"That's the sort of thing we ought to have more of, instead of spending such an everlasting time on rudiments," remarked a boy who had been a member of the Second the previous year.

"Still, you've got to learn the rudiments before you can do anything in a scrimmage," protested a new chap.

"That's all right," said the first fellow, whose name was Neil Gunnison, and who talked in a brisk, decided manner. "But you don't have to keep it up the way Hornbrook does. He's at it for weeks and weeks, and in the end there's mighty little time left for the fellows to learn to play together. Say! Did you notice Kingdon? He'd make a dandy little quarter if he only had half a show."

"His playing seemed all right," conceded the

other stiffly. "But I'd hate to be on the same team with a fellow who——"

"Bunk!" interrupted Gunnison contemptuously. "You don't pay any attention to that sort of stuff, do you? Were you on the train from Boston? You ought to have been. Kingdon made a regular howling show out of Hornbrook, as easy as rolling off a log. Of course, Wash has been down on him ever since, and he's the sort to do anything he can to put a chap he don't like in bad."

"You think——"

"I think King's a mighty decent sort, and not at all the kind who'd tattle to 'Tilly, no matter what they did to him. Trouble with you, Jones, and a lot more of the fellows, is that you don't make up your own minds; you let the crowd that's trying to run the school do your thinking for you. Take my advice, look Kingdon over a bit before you turn him down. There he goes with Red Phillips. Come ahead and we'll walk up with them."

Rex was a little surprised to have the two boys join them, but he took part pleasantly in Gunnison's talk about the practice. Already he had picked him out as the right sort, and before they

reached the buildings this impression was considerably strengthened. He didn't care so much for Schuyler Jones, who came from a wealthy New York family, and couldn't seem to forget that fact.

Rex paused at the tower door, and the two other fellows strolled on.

"I dressed up in my room," explained the blond chap, in answer to Phillips' questioning glance. "But I was wondering whether it wouldn't be a good idea for me to go with you to the gym, just the same."

"Why?" asked Red. "Afraid Wash and Bruce'll be so sore they'll forget their manners and lam me?"

Rex laughed. "Not quite. Only won't it look as if I was sneaking off because I was scared to meet them?"

"What do you care for looks? You're not afraid, are you? Well, then, just chase up to your room and change. Don't worry about what's happening down there. I'll be up as soon as I can."

"Oh, you Reddy!" cut in the dulcet voice of Pewee Hicks, who came dancing up from the direction of the gym. "Oh, you bold, bad deceiver!

Of course you're not going to catch it right where Mabel wore the beads! Oh, no!"

"What's tangled in your wheels, Midget?" inquired Phillips calmly. Then, as if disdaining the affectation of ignorance, he went on drawlingly: "I suppose Wash is a bit hot under the collar, eh?"

"Hot!" repeated the precocious small boy, with an upward roll of his eyes. "Oh, no, not by any means! What gave you such a silly notion? He's only been drinking tabasco sauce and chewing live coals out of the furnace. Better come along and get it over with, old man, before the temperature gets any higher."

Kingdon took his foot from the step, glancing at his friend. "I believe I won't go up, after all," he said. "I——"

"I believe you will!" retorted Phillips, with considerable force. "Did you ever see a red-head who didn't love pepper? You do as I tell you, and let me manage this my own way without being handicapped by having you about. Now beat it. You're delaying the game."

With a laugh and a shrug of resignation, Kingdon went on up the steps. In the doorway, however, he halted long enough to see Phillips start

briskly for the gym entrance, followed closely by Hicks. The latter walked with an exaggerated stride, tossing into the air and deftly catching an imaginary bâton. And from his pursed lips there issued the mournful, dirgelike strains of Chopin's Funeral March.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### "DELTA TAU CHI."

Entering his room, Rex pulled off his things, went to the lavatory for a shower, and then dressed leisurely. In the midst of the process Midkiff appeared, and Kingdon explained the situation to him. They were still discussing various possibilities when the door opened and Phillips entered. As usual, he was grinning, but his face seemed to denote that he had recently emerged from a strenuous altercation.

"Was it interesting?" inquired Rex, as he threw himself upon the Morris chair.

"Quite!" Red smiled at the recollection. "They were just about the sorest bunch you ever saw. Pitched into me right off the bat. For five minutes I couldn't get a word in edgewise. Cartwright was the worst. He can be nasty when he's mad. I had to button him up or there'd been a real scrap."



Both Rex and Midkiff smiled at the mental picture of a fight between Phillips and the elongated, unathletic football manager.

"Then they didn't approve with extreme unction, whatever that is?" chuckled Rex.

"They did not. To be quite frank, they intimated I wasn't fit to run a team of croquet players. Said I'd deliberately insulted them by allowing a fellow to play who'd been turned off by Wash himself, and had got even for it by squealing to Tilly. Oh, they love you—they certainly do! I told 'em you hadn't squealed. I likewise remarked that Wash was showing venom because of that trick you played him on the train. But he just brushed that aside as if he hadn't heard it, and gave me another broadside for having those scrimmages and upsetting his system of practice. Then Cartwright stuck in his oar, and—— Well, we had rather a jolly session."

"How'd it end?" asked Rex.

"Oh, I'm to kick you out and not have anything more to do with such a scoundrel! Likewise, of course, I'm to go back to the Hornbrook system of practice. If any more doubtful questions arise, I'm not to use my own judgment, but must apply for instructions to headquarters."

"All of which you'll fall over yourself to carry out, I suppose?" said Midkiff dryly.

"What a good guesser you are, Mid!" returned Phillips. "If Kingdon won't come out to-morrow of his own accord, I'll hog-tie him and trundle him to the field in a wheelbarrow. I'm going to show that crowd that I've got a mind and some judgment of my own. If they wanted a figure-head, they should have appointed someone else."

"But look here, Red," put in Kingdon, with a touch of earnestness, "I don't want you to overdo this on my account, and hurt yourself. Suppose Hornbrook dropped you from the team?"

Phillips shrugged his shoulders. "He can't," he declared confidently. "He wouldn't dare. This is my third year on the team, and, without wanting to throw bouquets at myself, I *can* play football. The whole school would be up in arms if he tried that, and Tilly would be down on him in two shakes, to say nothing of Mickey."

Kingdon raised his eyebrows. Michael Penruddock was the full name—which nobody used—of the pleasant young man who instructed them in physics and the natural sciences.

"What's he got to do with football?" he asked.

"Sort of coach," explained Red, reaching for

the door-knob. "He hasn't much power, but in a case like this he'd butt in. No, Wash wouldn't dare fire me. He'll make things hot, of course, but I can stand that. Well, I must hike. Want to see Chip before supper."

"You've got the greatest bunch of queer rules in this place," remarked Kingdon to his roommate, when Phillips had departed. "Imagine having a coach without any power!"

"Survivals of the Dark Ages," explained Midkiff tersely. "Been handed down goodness knows how many years, I reckon. Must have had their uses some time, though they're mighty antiquated now. Ought to be revised, but the doctor's keen about all that old-fashioned stuff. Makes us different from other schools, you know. Officially, Mickey's not a coach, but the 'faculty adviser.' After the First and Second Elevens are picked, he helps drill the fellows, works out new plays, and all that. We'd have a heap sight better team if he had the power to buck up against Hornbrook and that bunch. Four years ago he was on the Harvard Varsity, and he knows—— Well, what are you grinning about, anyhow? I don't see anything funny."

"You wouldn't be likely to, John," laughed Rex,

but somehow he said it in a manner which held not a vestige of sting. "A sense of humor isn't your strong suit. Look here, old man, would you care about joining a secret society?"

He held in his hand a square pasteboard box he had taken from the top bureau drawer. Midkiff regarded him with frowning suspicion.

"What society?" he growled.

"The Delta 'Tau Chi," returned Rex, his face sobering and his voice taking on a reverential huskiness.

"Huh! I haven't any use for Greek-letter fraternities," sniffed Midkiff. "I never could abide 'em."

"I'm sorry," murmured Kingdon. "I sort of hoped—— There's the pin."

He took one from the box and held it out. Midkiff examined it with a puzzled frown.

"What's it mean?" he asked presently.

"One tau has been left out. The original was Delta 'Tau 'Tau Chi. Turned into plebeian English, the letters stand for our name and battle slogan, Death to the Clan."

"What!" exclaimed Midkiff. His face lit up suddenly. "You mean it's in opposition to—— And you want me to join? You can count me in

on that, Kingdon. I'd join anything that was out for the Clan's scalp. How many members have you got? What's your plan of campaign? Are you going to——"

"See here, old fellow," cut in Rex, feeling rather guilty before this sudden and surprising burst of enthusiasm, "it's only a joke Lane and I started to get a rise out of the Clanites. I don't approve of the Clan, but if fellows want to go on joining it that's nothing to me. Life's too short to go round trying to get people to believe that they're all wrong and you're all right. Garry and I just had to have some kind of a name, so we chose that for fun. It really doesn't mean anything at all, you see—that is, actively."

Midkiff's face showed disappointment, and for a moment he stood twisting the little pin between his muscular fingers. Then he looked over at Kingdon.

"Maybe it doesn't mean much now," he said, "but that's no sign it never will. I'll take a chance on joining, I guess. Who else have you got besides Lane?"

Before Rex could answer, Garry himself appeared, flushed and breathless, with apologies for having forgotten his appointment. He was de-

lighted with the pins and pleased that Midkiff had joined them. Until the supper gong sounded, the three boys sat together on the odd-looking window-seat discussing possibilities for further increasing the membership.

"We want to act as if it was a real fraternity, and get the best fellows we can," declared Midkiff, in his positive fashion. "The first thing to do is to put the names of all eligibles on a sheet of paper and divide them into three lots for each of us to approach. That ought to be done carefully, you know, so that if any boy refuses to join he won't know it's nothing but a burlesque."

As he outlined his idea in detail, Rex watched his earnest face and abrupt gestures interestedly. Then, all at once, a curious conviction flashed into his mind.

"By Jove! He means it!" he thought. "He's taking it seriously, the way he takes everything else. I'll be hanged if I don't think he's got some scheme in his head for bucking the Clan and putting it out of business."

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE BLOW FALLS.

Pewee Hicks was the first to observe the Delta Tau Chi pins ornamenting various waistcoats. On the way back from chapel next morning his sharp eyes, catching the glint of something just above Rex Kingdon's watch pocket, promptly bulged with curiosity.

"What's that, Kingdon?" he asked interestedly, pointing a slim finger.

"What are you talking about, Midget?" inquired Kingdon blankly.

"Oh, that breastplate you've got laid over your stomach," returned Pewee. "Why, the letters are Greek, ain't they? Delta Tau——"

"Hush!" Rex's voice was grave and reproofing. "We don't talk about such things."

"You don't? What's the matter? Ashamed to?"

But Kingdon could not be lured into an airy



retort. His manner was serious almost to solemnity.

"You grieve me, Pewee," he stated. "There are times when flippancy is merely an evidence of bad taste and poor bringing up. I might excuse it from a non-fraternity man, but for a member of the Clan to behave this way is——"

An eloquent shrug completed the sentence, as if the speaker found himself at a loss for a word emphatic enough to express his opinion. For a moment Hicks' phenomenal composure was badly shaken. He seemed actually embarrassed. Though his recovery was prompt, he had evidently been impressed. He was not slow to discover the pin on several other boys, and commented shrilly thereon. But each fellow took his cue from Kingdon, refusing even to talk of the matter and treating it in so serious a fashion that within an hour the curiosity of the entire school was aroused.

What was this new society? Who were the members? Where and how had it started? How would the Clan be affected by the presence at Walcott Hall of a rival fraternity? Numberless other questions were asked throughout the school during the morning, and few of them were an-

swered with any great certainty. It was easy enough to pick out the fellows wearing the puzzling new insignia. Besides Kingdon, Lane, and Midkiff, there were Neil Gunnison, Bob Lockwood, and Geoff Macbeth, promising football material of the Fifth and Sixth Forms; Lester Sands, editor of the Walcott Hall *Forum*; Van Kirk and Meserole, of the track team; and Willis Orne, catcher on the baseball team. In addition, several rather promising-looking freshmen—one a chap the Clan had actually been considering for membership—sport the badge.

It was this last case, more than anything else, which roused the ire of the Clanites and then made them do some thinking. If this new society was going to step in and grab men the Clan wanted, it bade fair to become a good deal of a nuisance. Of course, there could be no question of actual rivalry; the Clan still had a large majority of fellows who were at the top in athletics. But Hornbrook and others were not slow to observe that the D. T. C. had raked in all the other prominent athletes, as well as a number of fellows who went in for other lines of public endeavor.

"It's Kingdon's doings, I'll bet a hat," stated Wash to a few choice spirits who had met in the

hallway during the course of the morning. "That fellow ought to be put in his place, once and for all. By Jove! It makes me furious to think of him out on the field again to-day, and me tied down here by his dirty work."

"You think Red will let him play, then?" questioned someone doubtfully.

"I'm sure of it. He's just stubborn enough to go against me for spite. I was a perfect chump to put him in charge, but how the mischief could anybody know he'd go and do this? Just wait till the week is over, though, and I'm free to go where I like." His jaw squared and his black eyes flashed ominously. "I'll pull off a surprise or two that'll make him sit up and take notice, believe me!"

As the days went by neither Phillips nor Kingdon doubted that Wash had something up his sleeve. The very completeness with which he had ceased trying to influence Red after the first day, showed that something was in the wind. When Phillips failed in every detail to obey his positive orders there was no flare-up afterward, no comment even. Cartwright could not refrain from snarling out something disagreeable when-

ever they met, but Wash preserved a chilly silence.

"Makes you feel he's storing up all his mad for one grand blow-up at the end of the week," remarked Phillips, after one of these icy encounters. "Wonder what kind of a surprise he's got mapped out?"

Rex shook his head. "Haven't the least idea. Of course, he'll drop me like a hot cake, but I don't see what——"

"Not so sure of that," cut in Red. "You've been putting up the prettiest kind of a game all week and, unless I'm away off, Mickey's taking notice of it, all right."

It was quite true that Mr. Penruddock had shown up on the field every afternoon for the past three days. Rex had chatted with him more than once, and found him a pleasant person with an admirable fund of football knowledge. Also, on more than one occasion, he had glanced up from a scrimmage to find the master's eyes fixed on him with a certain sort of thoughtfulness. Still——

"But I thought you said he hadn't any say about the make-up of the teams," Rex protested.

"He hasn't—actually. But Tilly can stick a

finger in any athletic pie he wants to, and do a pile of damage if he feels inclined. Of course he hardly ever does any butting in, but if Mickey came to him with the news that an A-1 player had been thrown off the field just out of spite, the old gent would get right up on his haunches and howl like a wolf."

This was a new and decidedly encouraging outlook for Rex. He had taken it for granted that one of Hornbrook's first acts on returning to power would be to put him off the field, and the possibility of remaining on almost any terms was rather pleasant.

But this brought him no nearer the solution of what was in store for Phillips. Red still held to the conviction that Hornbrook would not dare drop him from the team, but Kingdon had begun to doubt. Short of that, he could think of no very severe punishment which might be made the penalty for Red's insubordination, and he did not believe Hornbrook would content himself with anything trivial.

Like all other days, the one that brought the end of Hornbrook's probation arrived at last. That others, besides Phillips and Hornbrook, were looking forward to the afternoon with no

little interest, was plainly evident. All through the morning a certain restlessness was to be detected in the demeanor of almost every fellow who played football, and many who did not. Now and then small groups formed in corners to talk in low whispers. Fellows passing one another on the way to and from recitations were very apt to say: "Something doing on the field this aft, old man. See you down there?" And the other lad was almost sure to reply with an emphatic "Sure! Wouldn't miss it for a farm."

Rex dressed in the gym, as he had done all the week except on that first day. A great many more fellows than usual were about, and he and Phillips seemed to divide the interest of the crowd with Hornbrook and his satellites. Under the circumstances, it wasn't so easy to preserve an appearance of careless indifference without overdoing it. He managed it fairly well, however, but he was not a little thankful to escape from the building with Red and start for the field.

About halfway there, they overtook Mr. Penruddock strolling in the same direction. Rex's first impulse was to moderate his pace with the master's and continue on in his company. Then he realized that, to the Hornbrook faction fol-



lowing close behind, this might look like currying favor with those in power. So he merely spoke in passing. At least, that was all he meant to do, but the master asked a question that required a moment or two to answer, and the result was that all three went on to the field together.

When one expects something to happen, the longer it is put off the greater is the wear and tear upon one's nerves. Wash started the practice going with something like his usual manner, though a trace of added briskness was noticeable. The candidates were divided nearly as they had been that first day, and then made to go through the various rudiments of the game under the supervision of certain of the older fellows.

Rex was not ordered from the field. In fact, Hornbrook seemed to pay no particular attention to him, and, beyond curtly sending him to Kester, did not address him once. Beauty was distinctly vindictive in his comments, and once or twice the scowling Cartwright paused near by to make remarks which were distinctly more forcible than flattering. But Rex did so well that it was impossible to find fault with his performance, and what they said affected him not at all.

Not far away Phillips was coaching a group



of backs. Evidently Wash had not yet landed on him, either. Now and then during the afternoon, Kingdon's glance strayed to his friend and rested questioningly for a moment on the flushed and freckled face. Once their eyes met, and Red's sandy brows went up in an odd note of interrogation. A little later, as Rex pursued and fell upon a ball which had bounced over near his friend, the latter found occasion to murmur in a whimsical undertone:

"Those Spanish inquisition ducks didn't have a thing on Wash for keeping a chap in suspenders, eh? He's got the art down fine, all right."

As the twilight was beginning to fall, there came a sudden shift. The lads who had been coaching their quota of candidates ceased the work abruptly, and told them to join the group gathered about one of the goal posts. Hornbrook stood there, smiling, and chatting with some of his particular cronies. When the boys were assembled around him, he straightened up and looked them over with a critical yet good-humored expression.

"Well, fellows," he began, with that brisk heartiness he could assume so well, "you've certainly made some progress while I've been away.

I've noticed an improvement in almost every one of you." His approving glance swept the faces before him, and each boy, taking the praise for himself—as Wash no doubt intended he should—swelled a little. "Usually we don't form the teams so soon, but under the circumstances I see no reason why we shouldn't have a little innovation. It'll start some friendly rivalry, perhaps, and that always helps a man's playing. I'll read the names of the fellows I've picked out—tentatively, of course—for the First Eleven and substitutes. Then I'll name the man I mean to appoint captain of the Second. According to school custom, he forms his own team from the material left over. You all understand that my list is not final by any means. Any men whose playing improves are likely to be advanced, just as any whose work falls behind will stand a good show of being dropped."

He took out a list and began to read. As name after name fell from his lips, Rex became more and more oppressed with the unpleasant conviction that Red had made a blunder in being so sure of his position on the First. Something told him what was coming—some touch of venom underneath Hornbrook's suaveness, perhaps. And

when the list was finished without Red's name being included thereon, Kingdon was not surprised.

"But how does he dare?" he muttered, under his breath. "How's he going to account for it to Tilly?"

"Regarding the captain of the Second," resumed Hornbrook, in his smooth, even voice, "I've decided to try an experiment this year. Usually, as you know, he's picked from the left-overs. I've been thinking about that a good deal, and it seems to me, considering the importance of the Second, both in daily practice with the First and as material to replace fellows who don't play up to standard, that we ought to have a first-class player in that position—an A-1 fellow who can put ginger into the boys and teach them every trick of the game. Some of you may think I've weakened the First by my choice, but I believe it will be shown that any loss there will be more than made up by the increased efficiency of the Second. I've picked out"—he paused an instant, a touch of triumphant venom rising for a second above the blandness of his tone—"Larry Phillips, and I don't believe I'll have any reason to regret the choice."

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### COUNTER PLOT.

Rex drew a long breath. The blow had fallen. Hornbrook had scored. No one, not even Dr. Tillinghast, could combat the plausibility of his argument. For a moment there was an odd silence. Then came a halting, half-hearted cheer, as if the majority didn't know whether to be pleased or otherwise. All eyes turned to Phillips, Kingdon's among the rest. Rex was furious at the meanness of the trick, and his first hope was that Red would refuse the appointment, even if such an action resulted in his being dropped entirely.

For a second or two it looked as if that was what Phillips had in mind. His face reddened, his eyes flashed, his big fists clenched themselves tightly at his sides. Then, all at once, he smiled at the team captain in a manner which made Rex want to hug him.

"Say, Wash," he drawled, in his lazy, good-humored manner, "you must want to soak me with the cost of a new hat. My head's big enough already without having it all swelled up by those sweet, sugary things you've been saying about my work."

Hornbrook smiled back at him. "I didn't say half what I had in mind," he returned, with an underlying touch of meaning.

"I believe you!" countered Phillips. "Well, suppose we cut out the bouquets. Knowing how much you think of me, I can take that for granted."

"You accept, then?"

"The scrub captaincy? Oh, sure! So long as I'm helping the school, the special way I do it doesn't cut much ice. If you fellows think I can do more good running the Second than by playing on the regular team, that suits me. I guess I'm like you that way, Wash. We're for the school first of all, regardless of our little personal likes or dislikes, aren't we?"

In spite of his admirable self-control, Hornbrook reddened and a momentary gleam of something the reverse of friendliness came into his eyes. "Well, that's settled, then," he said short-

ly, turning on his heel. "To-morrow we'll go over the make-up of the team together, and start business in earnest."

As he walked away, accompanied by the usual crowd, a stir went through the throng that was left—a ripple of relief, a laxing tension, as if the fellows were thankful at the peaceable ending of a situation which had been full of disagreeable possibilities. Phillips at once became the center of attention. The boys crowded about him, making all sorts of comments and remarks, which continued all the way back to the school. Some were critical, while others diplomatically strove to smooth things over with rather labored optimism. A few hot-heads openly denounced Hornbrook's action, and gave their opinion of the team captain in unmeasured terms.

Rex took no part in the argument and comment, and Phillips treated it all with careless nonchalance that was admirable. Kingdon was moving off the field with the rest of the fellows, when, somewhat to his surprise, Chip Hatfield came up and openly took his arm.

"I was barking up the wrong tree the other day, old man," he said quickly. "I ought to have known better, but I—well, I guess I was just

naturally foolish in jumping at conclusions that way."

"You certainly are some lively little jumper," returned Rex. "How do you happen——"

"About five minutes afterward I began to wonder if I hadn't made a bull. This settled me." He jerked his head toward Red Phillips and frowned. "It was a dirty trick for Wash to play, and shows just what sort of a chap he really is. I wish Red had turned him down and refused to have anything to do with the Second."

"And given Hornbrook a chance to drop him altogether?"

"I don't see how——"

"He'd probably say he is running the team, and that if Red don't choose to do as he is told, he should know what he can do—or something like that. He's been clever enough to make it appear he's appointing Red to a place of honor. I hope he chokes!"

Hatfield was in thorough accord with such sentiments. By the time the school plateau was reached, their mutual indignation was sufficient to bridge over the slight stiffness and restore the two boys to very nearly their former friendly intercourse. They parted at the gym door. Hurry-



ing in, Rex wasted no time in dressing. Once or twice he caught Phillips' glance from across the room. When he was finally ready to leave, he met Red at the door, and they walked off together.

"Well, he worked it, after all," commented the big fellow, dropping an arm across Kingdon's shoulders. "You were right, and I was wrong."

Evidently he was striving to keep up the same assumption of careless indifference that he had shown almost from the first. But either the strain of making believe was tiring him, or he unconsciously relaxed his efforts in the presence of a friend. At any rate, Rex detected a note of bitter regret and disappointment that told as plainly as words how little his friend was reconciled to the prospect ahead. Red did not want to be captain of the Second. He did not wish to play, in fact, save in his old position on the First Team. His attitude had been, as Rex suspected, merely the instinctive defense of one who is hurt and sore against the triumphant gloating of an enemy.

"It was a miserable trick," Kingdon said hotly. "We'll get back at him, though. There must be some way."

"No way I can see that'll put me back on the team unless he says the word," burst out Phillips, with the first touch of angry petulance he had shown. "I wanted to play Winchester. I've been looking forward ever since last fall to getting square with those fellows for the licking they gave us then, and now—— Hanged if I'm not doing the booby act! Forget it, will you? Let's hunt up Middy. It'll do me good to hear him snarl about the Clan, even if I do belong to it."

"You might resign and join the D. T. C.," suggested Rex, an undercurrent of seriousness beneath the jesting tone. "We'd welcome you with open arms, old man."

Phillips knew about the new society. Considering the closeness of their relations, Rex had not thought it quite fair to keep him in the dark as they were keeping the rest of the school. He knew he could trust his friend, and so, with the permission of Midkiff and Lane, he had explained the nature of the secret, much to Red's amusement. At his present suggestion the latter merely hunched his shoulders.

"I might do worse," he commented, as they stepped into the "Great Divide." "Only thing is, it would look as if I were sore."

"Well, you are, aren't you?" tartly inquired Midkiff from the window-seat. "If you're not, you ought to be. Everybody else is saying what he thinks of Hornbrook for playing such a dirty trick, though I don't know what more anybody would expect from *him*." He paused, his snapping eyes shifting from one to the other of the two boys, as if challenging either of them to dispute the truth of his remark. When no comment of any sort was made, he sniffed disgustedly. "What's that you're talking about that would make them think you were sore?" he inquired.

"I suggested that he resign from the Clan and come over to us," explained Rex.

"Exactly what I was going to propose!" exclaimed Midkiff emphatically. "We haven't very much of a bunch yet, but it'll grow fast, and every decent chap is with you, of course. This is going to be some fight, believe me! The more fellows we can get——"

"Fight!" Phillips' laugh was bitter. "What do you expect to accomplish by fighting? If you suppose for a minute that you can make Wash eat his words and back water, you've got another guess coming. He'll never restore former conditions."

"I don't want former conditions."

"Oh, indeed! Enjoy seeing me play nurse to a lot of half-baked kids, I suppose? You'd rather have me captain of the Second than——"

"I'd rather have you where you can put the kibosh on Hornbrook for good," retorted Midkiff, his dark eyes snapping. "Do you mean to say you haven't seen your chance? Aren't you wise yet to what you'll be able to pull off?"

"On the scrub, you mean?" asked Phillips rather bewilderedly.

"Right-o! Hornbrook can't reverse his appointment of you as scrub captain, can he—without cause, that is? Don't you begin to get me? Forgotten the independence that goes with the position? Your power——"

Kingdon caught his breath and gave vent to a smothered exclamation of surprised comprehension. Midkiff glanced toward him with lifted eyebrows.

"Catching on at last? I wondered how long it would take to penetrate solid ivory. Now, if Red——"

"Spit it out, one of you, and end the agony!" urged Phillips, exasperated to the point of explosion. "I never could stand guessing puzzles.

What's he mean, King? Give it to me in words of one syllable, please."

"I don't know, but I reckon it must be the same idea that came to me," said Rex swiftly. "You're captain of the Second, without a chance in a hundred of being shifted, aren't you? And you've the power of appointing any player who hasn't been taken by the First. Well, what's to prevent your making up a team that'll lick the pants off Wash and the bunch of favorites he's worked into the First Eleven?"

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE GAUGE OF BATTLE.

A moment Red sat, his eyes and mouth wide open. Then his face resumed its normal expression and, reaching over, he gave Midkiff a resounding slap on the back.

"Great guns!" he exclaimed jubilantly. "Mid-dy, you're getting to be a great little old marksman, all right. Ring the bell every crack, don't you? A team that would lick the First! I wonder if that is possible with the material I can get?"

"Why not?" demanded Midkiff sharply. "Have you forgotten the fellows Hornbrook's turned down in the last three years just because he didn't happen to like their manners or their brand of humor or the way they brushed their hair, or something equally silly? There's quite a bunch of them that could play football, let me tell you."

"That's just it; they could—but can they now?"

"They can be licked into shape, I should hope. Anyhow, it's worth trying, isn't it?"

Phillips grinned. "You bet it is! It would be worth trying if only to get Wash's goat. He's expecting me to consult with him to-morrow about the formation of the team. Wouldn't you like to see his face when I—— There goes the bell! Say, fellows, how about getting together to-night and going over this in earnest? Three heads are always better than one, and we don't want to miss any promising material. Suppose I run up around eight, so we can make an evening of it?"

Midkiff and Kingdon both accepted the suggestion readily, and all three went down to supper. When they came out, Rex found Phillips waiting for him. Together they strolled through the quadrangle and out over the level stretch in front of Old Hall. Red had evidently been considering the situation during suppertime, and throughout the stroll he was full of interest and enthusiasm in his subject.

"It's tackles we need most," he said, as they circled around toward the school again. "I can't seem to think of but one fellow who would do be-



hind the line, either. Suppose we chase up Mid-dy; he may have ideas on the subject."

"By the way, what's his grudge against Hornbrook, anyhow? He hates Wash like poison."

"Great Cæsar!" gasped Phillips abruptly. "Say, kick me, will you? Hey! That's enough!" he added, leaping hastily aside as Rex obeyed promptly and without question. "I didn't invite you to polish those number ten brogans on my best pants. You can give me the dunce-cap, all right!"

"Just as you say," smiled Kingdon. "I always suspicioned—— How'd you happen to wake up to the bitter truth?"

"Why, Middy's just the fellow I want for one of the tackles! Came out his first year, you know, and worked like a horse. Wash strung him along and got all the work he could out of him, and then turned him down in favor of a chap who wasn't near as good a man, but who happened to be chummy with the crowd. That's what made the old cub sore, and I don't know as I blame him much. It was pretty raw. He vowed he'd never touch a football on the field as long as Hornbrook was captain. Wash may be captain of the regular team, but I'm the one

Middy'll be working for. Let's hustle up and see what he says about it."

As they entered the room Midkiff straightened up and turned suddenly from the window-seat. His face was slightly flushed and there was a touch of defiant embarrassment in his manner. Rex was puzzled until he happened to lower his glance and discovered the cover drawn over the full length of the seat and the pillows divided into two geometrical piles, one at either end.

"Great snakes!" he exclaimed. "What the deuce are you doing there, Jawn? Why, you've ruined the effect!"

"I'm sick of that foolishness," growled the tall chap crossly. "There's no reason in the world why we shouldn't have some decent sort of order about things."

"But you don't like frippery or trash on your side of the room," reminded Rex mischievously.

"I'd rather put up with it than the silly, lopsided effect you've made," retorted Midkiff.

"You admit, then, that having pillows and pictures and things is a lot more cozy and comfortable?"

Midkiff frowned. "I don't admit anything. It's choosing the lesser evil, that's all. And while

we're on the subject, I wish to goodness you'd throw out that beastly broken plaster thing. If you don't, I'm likely to."

"Forget that now, old boy," cut in Phillips. "Take it up later. In the meantime we've got something more interesting and important to talk about than broken lions. You'll come out for the Second, won't you?"

"Sure, unless you've got somebody better for tackle." The big fellow's lips tightened. "That's one of the reasons, I confess, why I've been so keen about all this. I want to show Hornbrook up before the whole school as a person who isn't fit to run a football team, or anything else. Time and time again he turns down fellows who can play, simply because they don't happen to toady to him. If I play all around that particular pet he threw me down for, perhaps it'll make him look small."

Phillips nodded. "It will. Wish I had a few more with that spirit," he added in an undertone to Rex, as Midkiff went over to light the lamp. "We'd be able to shove that crowd of Wash's clean off the field."

"I don't know why we can't work up a pretty good imitation of that spirit," suggested King-

don. "There must be plenty of fellows who are sore at Hornbrook and disgusted with his methods. The only reason they haven't rebelled before, very likely, is because nobody thought of taking the initiative. Suppose we get busy with that list. I've an idea it's not going to be so hard, after all, to raise the banner of rebellion."

Little studying was done by the trio that night. After the rosters of the three upper forms had been carefully scanned for football material, and the names of possibilities jotted down, there still remained the hardest task of all—the coöperation of the chosen ones had to be enlisted and their enthusiasm fired. Some of them were seen and won over that night. The conversion of one or two, in fact, was accomplished by the zealots in a late hour, and under considerable risk of discovery by the powers. Others were approached during the morning intermissions, and this work was continued almost until the moment of dressing for practice.

The result surpassed all expectations. Red Phillips sought the field that afternoon fortified by the pledges of enough fellows to make up an eleven and substitutes of uncommonly good average. The majority of them were green, of course,

and lacked practice in the newer and finer points of the game. They would need considerable breaking in before they could hope to make much showing against the regular team. But the newly appointed scrub captain was not at all discouraged. What was more, he awaited, with not a little hidden amusement, Hornbrook's proposed consultation regarding the Second Team. When that finally came he gently refused Wash's suggestions with a straight face.

"I can't see why you don't want Schaeffer," protested Hornbrook impatiently. "He's not half bad at end."

"That may be, but you see, old man"—Red's voice fairly dripped sweetness—"I've already practically picked the whole of my crowd. Of course some of them may drop out, in which case I'll consider Schaeffer. But I can't promise."

"Hugh!" grunted Hornbrook disagreeably. "Who are you going to play?"

Phillips had made out a list of the men and their positions. He now handed it over casually. Hornbrook took it quickly and ran his eyes over the paper. Presently he raised his head and regarded Phillips with an odd, appraising stare.

"So that's what you're up to, is it?" he inquired in a low tone. "Your object is to——"

"My object is to work up a good team that will give you fellows the finest sort of practice, and all of it you want. Do you know, Wash, I've a notion the boys may go even a step further and give you a shade more practice than you will find entirely pleasing."

## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE SCRUB IMPROVES.

Day after day Phillips and his lieutenants worked unceasingly to put snap and speed and ginger into the fellows who had been driven from football to some other form of athletics because of Hornbrook's policy of discrimination and favoritism. With all the willingness in the world to play the game as they had once played it, those boys found that "getting back" was far from easy. They had been so long strangers to the gridiron—at least, many of them had—that, while in excellent condition, they seemed to have lost the power of cohesion and of fighting together shoulder to shoulder.

Hornbrook and the opposition crowd, quickly becoming aware of this condition, joyfully seized the opportunity to make things as uncomfortable as possible for the scrub. In practice, save in the management and make-up of the Second, Horn-



brook had practical control of affairs. It pleased him, during those early days, to give the ball to the First Eleven and then proceed to shove the opposition the length of the field. He had a way of persistently "rubbing it in."

"Rotten scrub!" he would sneer. "This isn't a game of tiddledywinks. Can't you do *anything*? Take the ball again, First, and we'll see if this lovely aggregation of football talent has any gumption at all."

Then the smashing rush of that seasoned line would commence again.

Phillips did his best to encourage his men, and was ably seconded by Rex. With gritted teeth and clenched fists, Midkiff fought like a fiend, as did many of the others. But each one fought alone. There were holes in the line through which the experienced Gillis repeatedly sent the pigskin, apparently with the greatest ease in the world. Now and then the scrub would seem to stiffen or rally or close up in some manner—often accidental—to prevent a gain. But the next time Gillis was quite certain to work some play which more than made up for the check, and Hornbrook would be given another opportunity to let loose a volley of sarcasm.

"I'm really disappointed in you, Red," Wash would drawl, with a wink at his always admiring audience. "I thought you'd get together a real team, old man. I was sure you'd manage to give us a little practice, anyhow. Have you looked through the Second and Third Forms? I believe you'd find better material there."

While this sort of thing irritated Phillips, he managed to keep his head and occasionally made a dry retort that turned the laugh. This was made easier by the fact that Hornbrook's tactics could not have pleased him better if they had been instituted expressly for that purpose.

"He's awful dense not to see that's exactly what our fellows need to pull them together," Red remarked to Kingdon as they toiled up the hill together after a strenuous afternoon. "They're getting so mad at being shoved around and taunted that they'll simply have to get back at the other crowd or bust. Seems to me I noticed a stiffening this afternoon. How about it?"

Rex nodded. "I saw it. We held 'em beautifully on the ten-yard line last time. Gillis finally had to work that trick play to put the ball through. Another week will show a great im-

provement. Wouldn't surprise me if we began to get Hornbrook's goat in a few more days."

"Me for his angora! By the way, we've got to get busy working out some plays, son."

"I was thinking that same thing last night, and doped out a pretty decent pass stunt. At least, Middy said it was fair. I'll show it to you after supper. Say, what do you s'pose Snoopy was doing on the field to-day?"

"Snoopy! Topping? Hanged if I know. Never knew him to even bat an eye at any kind of a game before. Maybe he was just walking up from the lake. I believe he takes his exercise by rowing half an hour every day. He must be a sight in a boat."

"That may be how he happened to be there; but he hung around at least a half hour, looking as if he hadn't the least idea what it was all about. That wig of his is mighty natural. I was looking at it in class to-day. Sure it really is one?"

"Sure! Glory! You'd be if you could have seen Wash fish it off with a hook and line last spring. Let down a hook from the gallery, you know, and jerked it clean off. Talk about a funny sight! The whole school howled. His nut was bare as a billiard ball. The way he grabbed the

wig, tried to put it back and got it on crooked was killing. I laughed myself sick."

"Must have been a scream," commented Rex dryly. He could picture the scene, and, in spite of his dislike for the master, he was conscious of sympathy for anyone placed in such a desperately uncomfortable position. "I suppose Hornbrook wasn't caught?"

"He's too slick for that. He picked a time when the whole form was off recitation. The minute he turned the trick he beat it out of the gallery and down the corridor to the chapel stairs. When school was dismissed, less than five minutes afterward, he was playing ball out beyond the cloister. Snoopy knew it was one of the Fifth, of course, but he couldn't identify the string or fish hook, so he never spotted the perpetrator. Wash gets away with it every time."

The account of this episode came back to Rex's mind next afternoon when, happening to glance up, he beheld the lank, awkward figure of Mr. Topping again ornamenting the sideline. His attitude was rather stiff, and his gloved hands were clasped precisely in front of him. He was staring at the pile of fellows from which Kingdon had just crawled, and the ball had been carried

so near that Rex could make out the expression of strained, puzzled intentness on the master's long, narrow face.

"Looks as if he is trying to understand the game and hasn't the least idea what it is all about," thought the boy rather contemptuously. "I can't see why he wastes his time on the field. Football and Snoopy are about as far apart as the poles."

From that day on every afternoon saw the unpopular tutor at the field. As sure as the hour came, he appeared from the lake at ten minutes past four and took his place with the scattered on-lookers who faithfully followed the practice of the two teams. Occasionally he exchanged a word or two with "Mickey" Penruddock, but more often he walked vaguely up and down the sidelines or stood with hands clasped, an odd, precise, incongruous figure. But always he wore that strained, bewildered expression Rex had noticed at first, and which became more and more of a puzzle to the boy. Neither Phillips nor anyone else could help him solve it. Somebody's suggestion that Mr. Topping was developing an interest in athletics was received with jeers.

"Nothing to it! Why, he don't know a foul

tip from the home plate, nor a kick-off from a five-yard penalty. What's more, he doesn't care a hang, either. He told Mickey last year that in his opinion entirely too much of our time was wasted nowadays in silly games. He thought they ought to give us an extra hour's recitation every afternoon."

So the reason for Snoopy's continued daily presence with the spectators remained a mystery that aroused a fair amount of general interest until the fulfillment of Rex Kingdon's prophecy riveted general attention. Before a week had passed the improvement of the Second Eleven transformed it into quite another team. No longer were Hornbrook's men able to shove their way down the field with the blithe assurance and boastful ease they had shown at first.

Quite suddenly, one day, the First was hurled back for a loss. The line they had once broken through so easily turned all at once to a thing of whiplash and whalebone. It bent and stretched and wavered, but it did not break. Irritated, amazed, they flung their weight upon it, seeking out the holes that once had loomed so large and easy. Of course, they finally got through, but only for small gains and at the expense of much

**exertion.** Next day the effort required was greater still, and several times the Second got the pigskin and did some pretty offensive work on their own hook.

Then the First journeyed condescendingly to a neighboring village to hold the annual slaughter of Hillton High. The players returned somewhat sobered, having won by the hair-margin of 6 to 5. Furthermore, they could not get away from the unpleasant realization that two minutes added to the last quarter would have seen another touchdown recorded for their despised opponents.



## CHAPTER XXVI.

### WRITING ON THE WALL.

"Too cock-sure," said Phillips, talking it over that night. "They were so certain they'd win that they didn't half try until it was almost too late."

"I wonder?" mused Rex. Somehow he was not as jubilant as he might have been. The narrow escape from defeat by such a team filled him with dismay. "I tell you what I think, old man: Those fellows have been having so much fun playing horse with us they've let their game go to pot. This ought to wake Hornbrook up, all right."

But Hornbrook passed over the unfortunate score with an airy lightness which made it seem of slight consequence. When he chose to exert himself, Wash possessed great charm of manner, and, while he could not quite make an intelligent person believe that black was white, he had the

faculty of making it appear to be a beautiful pearl-gray. He chatted casually about the uncertainty attending the first game of the season, commented on "off days," and jocosely remarked that they simply had to be charitable and let the High School boys score a little something after all these years of shut-outs. Nine hearers out of ten went away with the comfortable feeling that they had been borrowing trouble and that Hornbrook was the right man in the right place—which, of course, was just the impression Wash strove to convey.

Nevertheless, on the following Monday afternoon there was a mild shaking up of the eleven. One of the tackles was dropped in favor of a substitute, and there was a shift in the line. Likewise, under the captain's dominating influence, the play was noticeably brisker. For two or three days the work against the scrub continued full of snap and ginger. There was no hint of condescension, no attempt at horseplay. The First went after the Scrub exactly as if they were out for the scalps of an opposing team, and Phillips and his men countered with the very best that was in them.

It was admirable practice for both teams. Un-

fortunately, as Kingdon remarked, it was too good to last. Hornbrook could not put aside his grudge against Phillips and Rex. Perhaps he did not realize how much that grudge governed his actions, but it was a fact, nevertheless, that his rancor at this moment was even more powerful than his desire to mark his last year at Walcott Hall by heading a record-breaking team. Little by little he relaxed his proper efforts, paying more and more attention to schemes for annoying Phillips and the rest than he did to the working out of plays to be used in the games which intervened before they met Winchester, the final and most important enemy of all.

Unfortunately, he was not alone in this. Others on the team—fellows who had been favored with more regard for their congeniality than for their proficiency on the gridiron—followed the example of their leader, as they always did.

In this state of spleen and general irritation, the team played its second game. The score might have been worse, though it had not in several years; but it told nothing. The spectators knew that the day had been saved only by the dashing, erratic brilliancy of Hornbrook himself,

backed by the strength and skill and steadiness of Beauty Kester and Garry Lane. The remainder of the team seemed oddly demoralized.

"They're going back," said Phillips rather soberly, as he and Kingdon found seats on the train. They had been given leave to attend the game and had watched the performance with mixed feelings. "If they don't take a brace pretty soon, they'll be where we were ten days or so ago—each fellow pulling a different way."

Rex nodded, his face troubled. "It'll be worse than that. Lanning is going down hill fast, and Stub Moore isn't worth two cents."

"Right you are. If Wash had any sense he'd draft a decent guard and tackle from our crowd."

"I wish he would!" exclaimed Kingdon impulsively.

Phillips stared. "You wish——"

"Sure! It's still the school team, you know. No matter how much we may dislike Hornbrook and his methods, nobody wants to see Walcott Hall trimmed by Winchester. The others don't matter as much, but I'd certainly hate to have that Winchester crowd crow over us."

"So would I, old man," agreed Phillips slowly. "I wasn't thinking of that. Wash started out

with a grudge against you and me and Middy, but by this time he's got it in for about every fellow on the Second. He'd hate like the mischief to give any of 'em a chance with the regulars."

"But surely he'd do it to save the team from going to smash."

"I don't know. Likely he doesn't consider the situation as serious as that. We'll just have to wait and see."

It soon became apparent that Red was right, and that Hornbrook had no intention of elevating a single member of the Second. His demeanor in practice, however, revealed a subtle yet unmistakable change, which presently began to affect his manner at all times. Periods of thoughtful, silent cogitation would be succeeded by bursts of almost feverish jesting and laughter, as if he wanted to hide the fact that he was worrying over the football situation. He still sneered at the members of the scrub and treated them to ironic comments and contemptuous remarks, but that was during occasional moments of idleness when there was nothing else to take his attention.

At other times every particle of his energy was thrown into his efforts to brace up the team. Even Rex could not help feeling admiration at

the masterly manner in which the captain made use of the limited material at his command. Stub Moore quickly gave place to a substitute and Lanning was galvanized into new life and activity by constant tongue-lashing. Charlie Desbrow, who wilted under censure, perked up and improved greatly when Wash began to administer subtle praise and delicate flattery. Players were shifted, tried out, put back, shifted again. Their work was studied carefully in new positions, and perhaps they were kept there. Hornbrook tried everything in his power to improve the make-up of the eleven save the one move which would have accomplished his purpose. Seeing how stubbornly determined Wash was not to take a single man from the scrub, Kingdon's worry increased.

The game on the following Saturday was a one-man affair from start to finish. For sheer dash and brilliancy the like of Hornbrook's performance had never been seen at Walcott Hall. Dazzled by Wash's splendid work and pleased at having secured the winning goal, the majority of spectators looked with leniency on the otherwise poor showing. The boys would surely pick up before the St. Gothard game, to say nothing of that final, supreme contest with Winchester,

which meant so much to every loyal member of the school.

Midkiff gloated until his room-mate was ready to choke him. The boys who made up the team—or most of them—simply could not put up a better game. In the beginning, Hornbrook had picked his friends and satellites for the team, feeling that, in the case of failure, he had all the other school material to choose from. But, by his enmity for Phillips and, later, for the entire scrub, and his stubborn refusal to have anything to do with them, he had deprived himself of nearly all the really good players. The ones who were left seemed not worth having.

In spite of everything, Rex more than once felt sorry for the fellow. He was working so desperately and putting up such a brilliant game himself that it seemed as if he ought to win out. Yet, as the days passed and the St. Gothard game drew near, it did not appear possible that he could. Instead of improving, the mediocre members of the team, beginning to succumb to the stress and strain, actually seemed to go back. From the looks of things, they were quite likely to go entirely to smash when they came up against the rival school team.



All that week Rex grew more restless and irritable. He was annoyed by things that ordinarily he would have passed off with a laugh. Midkiff, with his constant gloating over Hornbrook's certain downfall, was especially trying, and more than once Kingdon was distinctly sharp with him. Even the inoffensive Mr. Topping annoyed Rex. He couldn't understand why the master kept coming out on the field, unless he, too, "had it in" for Wash and was likewise enjoying the pleasing prospect. By the time Friday arrived, Kingdon had worked himself into a far from enviable state of mind. The surprise sprung by Mr. Penruddock late that afternoon did not tend to brighten his mood.

As they were leaving the field toward dusk, a rather silent crowd, "Mickey" suddenly approached from behind, pulled Rex's arm through his, and drew him away from the others.

"I want you to do something for me, Kingdon," he said earnestly. "I want you to see if you can't make friends with Hornbrook."

Rex stared at him, aghast. "I can't do that," he protested. "That is, it wouldn't be any use. He——"

"I understand you're not very friendly," the

master interrupted, "but it seems to me in a matter so vital to the team's success you might be willing to put aside your dislike for a little."

"But it's not *my* dislike, Mr. Penruddock," Rex explained quickly. "He's the one who hasn't any use for me, and if I tried to bring him around, it would only make things worse."

"Are you willing to try?"

Rex hesitated. The prospect was one of the most disagreeable he had ever faced. Yet, if there was a chance of his being even partially successful, he could not refuse this appeal.

"I haven't much hope, sir," he said slowly at length, "but I'll do my best."

"Good! That's the right spirit. I felt sure I could depend on you. I've been talking to Hornbrook, and am sorry to say I could make little impression on him. He refuses to try what I wish, and doubtless you know that, according to the rules governing athletics here"—he flushed a little and a look of annoyance came into his pleasant face—"how powerless I am unless I take the matter to Doctor Tillinghast. I don't wish to do that, but it's imperative that something be done to strengthen the team immediately. Four or five of the players are distinctly second-rate stuff and

should be replaced by members of the Second Team. I want you to try your best to persuade him to give in. Show him that unless he does, the team cannot hope to escape defeat, not only to-morrow but against Winchester next week. You've not been here long, Kingdon, but perhaps you know something of the feeling—— I see you do. That'll help. Remember, it's for the school, and do your best."

His hand dropped on Rex's shoulder, resting there for a moment with a friendly grip. Then, with a nod and a smile, he moved on, leaving the boy to face a duty he would have given much to escape.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### THE TIME OF SUSPENSE.

Although Rex had no hope of success, he did not allow his lack of confidence to interfere with the sincerity of his effort. He meant to do his best to influence Hornbrook, even at the risk of considerable personal humiliation. If he failed, he would not have himself to blame.

He took no one into his confidence. As there was no chance of finding Wash alone early in the evening, later—about nine o'clock—he slipped out without telling Midkiff where he was going. He was soon knocking gently at Hornbrook's door on the second-floor corridor. When an impatient voice bade him enter, he stepped in, closing the door behind him.

The team captain was alone, Cartwright evidently having sought relaxation elsewhere. Collarless, with sleeves rolled above his elbows, Wash bent over the center table in the full glare

of the green-shaded student lamp. His usually sleek black hair now rose in a disordered crest above his frowning face. In one hand he held a pencil. On the table before him a large sheet of paper was completely scrawled over with football diagrams. He looked tired and utterly discouraged as he sat blinking at his shadowy visitor. In the moment which intervened before recognition froze Hornbrook's face into a sneering, hostile mask, Kingdon was moved by sympathy.

"Look here, Hornbrook," said Rex impulsively, as he moved swiftly toward the table, "you and I haven't hit it off very well, but is it worth while that our enmity should ruin the team and cause it to lose to St. Gothard and Winchester?"

Hornbrook did not speak. He leaned back in his chair, his lips curled in that frozen sneer, his eyes hostile and jeering. Kingdon flushed a little, but went on resolutely:

"Isn't there some way we can call a truce until after the last game next week? I'm willing to meet you more than halfway. If you'd only let it all drop just for this week and take what men you need from the Second, I'm sure——"

"Take you, for instance?" cut in Hornbrook

unpleasantly. "You'd like it very well, I dare say."

Kingdon's eyes narrowed, but he kept a grip on himself. "You know I didn't mean that," he retorted.

"How do I know what you mean?" snapped Wash, with a sudden flare of anger. "And I don't give a hang, either!"

"But you don't want Winchester to win!" protested Rex. "Honestly, Hornbrook, I'm willing to do anything to prevent that. I'll even get off the scrub, and stay off. I'll keep out of football for the rest of the season, if only you'll go right in and bolster up the team with other scrub material."

"You're a great little old windbag!" broke in Wash roughly. "But you can't put anything over on me. I see through your game. You think that after I've fallen for this sacrifice stuff and filled up the team with your precious friends, I'll have to put you in Gillis' place because he won't be able to handle the new bunch. I wasn't born yesterday. You can't teach me anything."

"I could teach you manners and sense!" flung back the visitor, white with indignation. "You

and your precious team can go straight to the dickens for all I care!"

Turning on his heel, he left the room.

The result was what he had expected, save that the humiliation was even greater than he had looked for. What a stubborn mule Hornbrook was! With half an eye he should have seen that Kingdon's offer was genuine and made at the cost of no little pride. He might have turned it down without deliberate insult.

When he reached his room, Rex's face was still tinged with an angry flush that caused Midkiff promptly to inquire where he had been and what he had been doing. Having no desire for anyone to know of the position in which he had placed himself, Kingdon was evasive.

Next morning, though still indignant at his rebuff, he had cooled down somewhat. He was even a little sorry for the impulsive remark he had made before departing. He didn't quite mean all of it, of course. He might despise Hornbrook, but he still had a tenacious interest and concern in the fate of the team. As soon as an opportunity offered, he informed Mr. Penruddock of the failure of his efforts to influence the captain.



Having listened quietly, the master refrained from asking any questions.

"I was a bit afraid it would be that way," he admitted regretfully. "It's too bad. Hornbrook himself will be hurt more by defeat than any other boy. It's a shame he's so stubborn."

"Will you speak to the doctor, sir?" ventured Kingdon, after a momentary pause.

The master shook his head. "Not at present. It's barely possible this afternoon may bring Hornbrook to his senses."

Rex concluded that defeat by St. Gothard was inevitable. And afterward would come Winchester, stronger and more formidable.

Reaching his desk, he soon became conscious of a general suspense and restlessness throughout the big room. The Fifth Form and the Third had the first hour for study. When the others had departed to class rooms, with much shuffling of feet, the feeling of tension continued among those who remained. Even Mr. Topping, who had charge that morning, seemed infected. Instead of occupying himself with a book, as usual, he left his desk and paced restlessly up and down the room. Always on the alert for mischief and particularly for anything which would annoy this

particular master, whom it was ever his delight to harass, Pewee Hicks seized a moment when Mr. Topping's back was turned to reach swiftly across the aisle and sweep a pile of books from the top of Darby's desk to the floor.

The crash made everybody jump nervously. Mr. Topping whirled about with a start.

"Whose books are those?" he asked instantly.

"Mine, sir," hesitated Darby.

"Pick them up."

The stout lad gathered up the books and restored them to the desk. Pewee, wearing an expression of bland and perfect innocence, appeared absorbed in study.

"Don't let it happen again, Darby," cautioned the master, as he resumed his pacing.

Hicks' bright eyes followed him closely. At what seemed the psychological moment, he reached out and upset the books again. This time Mr. Topping was on the alert. Turning with a jerk, he walked back to the end of the aisle.

"Hicks, pick up those books!" he commanded sharply. When Pewee, looking somewhat scared, had obeyed, the master went on curtly: "Now come to the front. Bring your book. Place that chair upon the platform, facing the school. Sit

there. Kindly keep in mind, Hicks, that this is the place to study. Any further exhibitions of buffoonery will result in a trip to the office."

To be sent to the office meant discipline at the hands of Dr. Tillinghast. Mr. Topping had been the cause of many such sentences in his time. In fact, he had the reputation of sending boys up for the most trivial of offenses. Rex, watching the proceedings interestedly, wondered why he hadn't done so in this case. Then he remembered that for some time Snoopy had not been so harsh with his punishment. Was it possible the spirit of reform had struck him?

But neither Mr. Topping, punishments, nor their lessons held the attention of any of the boys for very long. As the morning passed, the general restlessness increased. During dinner hour the great room buzzed with discussion and conjecture about the game. Almost immediately afterward, the boys began to dribble down to the field, where they strolled aimlessly about, waiting for the arrival of the St. Gothard team.

When the visitors finally appeared they were quickly surrounded by an eager, curious throng bent on sizing them up. The inspection was not encouraging. Though not unusually big or

heavy, there was a marked air of competence about the members of the opposing eleven. They carried themselves with a certain confidence, as if in no doubt whatever of their ability to make good. Their jokes and laughter came freely, without a hint of nervousness.

"It'll be a regular slaughter, mark my words," Phillips predicted gloomily to Kingdon. "Those fellows have got the punch. I wish I'd never——"

He stopped, biting his lips, and moved away. Rex did not ask him what it was he wished. He could guess. He also was a prey to the most uncomfortable regret and self-reproach. If they had never organized against Hornbrook and worked up the scheme of rivalry, Walcott Hall might have a decent team to-day. Yet, how could they have foreseen what the result would be? And certainly Wash had no right to let personal dislike influence him to such an extent.

Moving restlessly along the sideline, Kingdon presently encountered Midkiff, who looked even more scowling and disagreeable than usual. Rex refrained from commenting on the situation they had unwittingly helped to bring about. He felt sure Middy was not much happier than he at the

prospect. Together they settled down in silence, and presently Red joined them.

"Oh, zowie!" sighed the latter, after a little. "I don't know why we get right down in front. I'd give a lot if I could sneak off and not have to watch the game at all."

"Same here," echoed Rex fervently. "I'd give a good deal more, though, if our team, instead of the First, was going to play Saint Gothard."

Midkiff turned abruptly and stared at Rex in an odd, intent manner. His lips started impulsively, but closed again without a sound. Still speechless, his glance swept back to the field where the rival teams were moving to their places. He seemed to be sizing them up, gauging, appraising; but Kingdon noted the perplexed pucker on his room-mate's low forehead, and wondered what he was thinking so hard about.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### UNBIDDEN SYMPATHY.

That game will not soon be forgotten by the Walcott Hallers who saw it played. The majority of them had been prepared for defeat. It had been in the air for days. Even those who knew little of the game and next to nothing of the condition of the team had been influenced by the general premonition, so intangible, yet so strong.

Though he might hope for victory, however, scarcely anyone was prepared for a disagreeable rout. That was what happened. The team simply went to pieces in spite of the desperate efforts of Hornbrook, Kester, and Garry Lane to stem the tide. The line was swiftly shot full of holes, through any one of which it almost seemed as if the entire St. Gothard formation could thrust itself with ease. It reminded many a witness of the days when Hornbrook and his friends had amused themselves in shoving the newly or-

ganized scrub all over the field; but now Wash and his satellites were the sufferers.

To some of those Second Team men who watched from the sidelines with tense, strained faces and hands tightly clenched, it might well have seemed just retribution. But not one of them looked on it in that light. They were enraged at Hornbrook and bitter against the rest of the team for bringing disgrace on the good name of Walcott Hall, but they were not elated to witness the humiliation of those who had declared themselves their enemies.

At first, inspiring cheers rang out from the crowded stands. When Hornbrook made a spectacular dash around the end for the only touchdown scored by the home team, the cheering became a roar of joyful excitement. After that, little by little, the spirit of the spectators oozed away. They still cheered in rhythmic crashes of sound, but their efforts grew more and more mechanical. Finally, as St. Gothard continued to pile up a crushing score with nerve-racking regularity, even those mechanical bursts of noise lessened, halted, trailed off into eloquent silences. And at the bitter end, when the last whistle sounded, with the score 36 to 6 against them, the



crowd did not cheer at all. Even the traditional volley for the visitors was omitted. Dazed, aghast, some of the smaller enthusiasts actually in tears, they drifted away through the dusk, conversing in the hushed tones of attendants at a funeral.

Supper was a silent, gloomy affair. Few had recovered sufficiently to even talk about the disgrace that had fallen upon them. Members of the demoralized team went slinking about after the manner of persons trying to make themselves as small and inconspicuous as possible. Hornbrook did not appear. It was rumored that he had received leave of absence over Sunday to visit some relatives in one of the near-by towns.

With evening came the reaction. In corridors and recitation rooms there was much vague talk and impulsive criticism. Many of the fellows on the team were treated with marked coldness. A few boys, it is true, tried to make heroes out of Kester and Lane, but they had their trouble for their pains. The former was in a state of unrestrained temper, snarling and snapping at everyone and everything like an ill-mannered cub. Lane, who for weeks had been torn between duty

to the team and friendship for the opposition, was merely embarrassed.

Of course, everybody talked about the forthcoming contest with Winchester. They bewailed their condition, lamented the nearness of the struggle with their ancient enemies, wondered what would be done to strengthen the team, and discussed numberless plans to that end. However, it was not until just after church the next morning that Rex first heard the comment that instantly betrayed to him the hand of Midkiff.

"I'll tell you my opinion," said someone: "The Second could have done a heap better yesterday. They might even have held 'em."

The next fellow he met had jumped ahead to the inevitable: "Why shouldn't the Second play Winchester?" From that moment on it was the sole topic of discussion throughout the school. Kingdon took small part in this talk. If his chance came to play, he would fling himself into the struggle with all the strength and skill he possessed; but he had had enough of interference. Middy could talk it up all he wanted to; Rex refused to thrust a finger into the pie.

Hornbrook did not show up till Monday just before his first recitation. An hour later a no-

tice over his signature appeared on the bulletin board to the effect that there would be no practice that afternoon, but that the members of the regular team and the substitutes were called to report in the gym at four o'clock.

What it meant no one seemed to know, but everybody was curious, and there were innumerable suppositions. Rex tried to tell himself he did not care. He was uncommonly restless. Failing to persuade anyone to go for a tramp with him after dinner, he started off alone about three o'clock. He had been up to his room for a cap. Taking a short cut down the chapel stairs, he ran plump into Wash Hornbrook at the bottom.

Stepping back, for a moment both stood staring at each other with a touch of embarrassment. It was the first time Rex had seen the other lad at close range since his return that morning. Under the dark eyes there were rings that spoke of worry and sleeplessness. A pinched expression about the nostrils and an underlying touch of pain and mental suffering belied the defiant set of jaws and chin. At first, Wash seemed inclined to pass on without speaking. Then he changed his mind.

"I hope you're pleased with yourself," he said, with harsh abruptness.

"Pleased with myself?" repeated Rex, in surprise.

"Yes. I hope you're satisfied with what you've succeeded in bringing about. Saturday was a day to be proud of, wasn't it?"

Kingdon reddened. "I like your nerve, Hornbrook!" he ejaculated emphatically. "You've certainly got a gall to blame anybody but yourself for that mess. If you hadn't——"

"If I hadn't refused to let you and Phillips run the team, I suppose you mean, Saint Gothard would have gone home licked," cut in Hornbrook sneeringly. "Oh, you're a great little bunch of football talent! Everybody knows that, thanks to some of the blowhards who go round chanting their own praises. Well, now you'll have a chance to show the school just how much of that's fact, and how much is hot air."

With this somewhat enigmatical concluding remark, he pushed past Kingdon and took the stairs two steps at a time, leaving Rex staring indignantly after him. Presently, with a shrug, the latter walked out through the tower door and

went slowly down the slope toward the athletic field.

He must have taken that direction from force of habit, for his mind was entirely occupied with Hornbrook's final remark. What did he mean by it? Had Penruddock acted through the head master and forced Hornbrook to listen to reason? Or was it possible the stubborn captain had come to his senses and decided to recruit the team with members from the scrub? In either case, it seemed curious that the presence of the Second had not also been requested in the notice to assemble at four. If Wash didn't mean to reorganize the team, what was the meeting for?

Still turning the matter over in his mind, Rex reached the lake and paused at the entrance to the roomy boathouse. The day was one of those unseasonably warm ones which sometimes come as a surprise in the late fall. It was almost sultry, and looking across the glassy surface of the lake, which was scarcely ruffled by a breath of air, Rex decided that a little paddling was much more appealing than a solitary walk. Red Phillips was the owner of a very good canoe, and within five minutes, Rex was seated in that craft, propelling it up the lake with sweeping, easy strokes.

He could not seem to forget the expression he had caught in Hornbrook's eyes. The fellow had been really suffering. And, in spite of the repeated snubs to which he had been treated, Kingdon could not quite bring himself to the point of genuine rejoicing. It annoyed him not a little. He felt that he ought to experience satisfaction, if not actual pleasure, at the humiliation of the chap who, from the first, had striven to bring humiliation upon him. Instead, he was conscious of a furtive, unbidden sympathy. The splendid manner in which Hornbrook had fought his losing fight, the way he bore defeat without a whimper, the very stubbornness for which Kingdon's sensible self had blamed him, all combined to rouse another side of the boy to admiration—almost to liking.

"He'd be a fine chap if he wasn't so blamed spoiled," Rex said to himself, as he sent the little craft dancing over the water. "As so many flatter him, tell him what a wonder he is, and laugh at every silly thing he says, I suppose it's not surprising he thinks he's the whole shooting-match and can do about anything he tries."

The sheet of water was not large. Having made the circuit, Rex was approaching his start-

ing point when a row-boat, with a single occupant, left the dock and proceeded slowly up the lake. The boy recognized Mr. Topping, who sat erect and rigid, with shoulders back, elbows out, his knobby knees seeming almost to meet his chin. He handled the oars in a manner that might have been learned from a manual devoted to the art of rowing, but never from observation or verbal instruction. The stroke was short and precise, the motion being almost entirely in his forearms, and the manner in which his knees avoided continual interference with the oar-handles, was miraculous.

Rex grinned involuntarily. Then his face grew sober. Following not far behind Mr. Topping was a second boat bearing Pewee Hicks and another boy named Ormsby. Pewee, at the oars, was aping the tutor with a grotesque exaggeration that convulsed his companion. Sitting stiffly, with his chin elevated until it was a wonder he retained his balance, he rowed jerkily, thumping himself on the breast with every stroke. He accompanied this performance with various other posturings and facial contortions that kept Ormsby choked with laughter, and likewise rocked the boat recklessly.



Somehow the whole thing disturbed Kingdon's sensibilities. The tutor, doubtless doing the best he could without instructions, had suddenly assumed the aspect of a persecuted being. Rex felt a longing to give the sportive Hicks a chastening and vigorous shaking.

"Little dub!" he muttered, scowling at the boy. "That's not a bit funny. What's more, if you're not mighty careful, you'll take a plunge into the drink."

The words had scarcely left his lips when Pewee gave an extra contortion and lost his hold on one of the oars. With a lurch, he twisted around and made a wild grab for it. Then an abortive giggle merged into a shriek as the boat capsized, pitching both boys into the water.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### THE COURAGE OF TOPPING.

Rex thrust his paddle deep and sent the canoe shooting forward with a bound that matched the leap of his heart. There was terror in that shriek—the gripping terror that comes to the bather who cannot swim and suddenly feels the firm bottom slipping from beneath his feet. Ormsby had merely gasped convulsively. More than once Kingdon had noticed him paddling about in the gym pool with sufficient skill to keep him afloat, but Rex could not recall ever having seen Hicks frolicking with the other boys in the clear, greenish water of the marble-lined tank.

Mr. Topping had hurriedly brought his boat around, and was not more than a few feet away when the two small boys came to the surface. Ormsby, striking out shakily, was near the overturned boat, and Rex saw he could reach it. But Hicks merely gave a choking, gurgling cry, beat

the water wildly with his arms, and went under again. Then, to Kingdon's amazement, instead of thrusting out an oar or bringing his boat closer, Mr. Topping rose to his feet and plunged to the boy's rescue. The action was even more awkward than the grotesque manner in which he had been rowing. If he could swim at all, certainly he was no expert.

A thrill of admiration shot through Kingdon, changing swiftly to deep alarm as he saw Hicks seize the floundering tutor in a grip which has dragged many a would-be rescuer to his death. A second later Rex reached the spot. From the corner of his eye he caught a glimpse of another boat, and two canoes, hastily putting out from the boathouse. Without turning his head to see who was coming, he rose swiftly to his feet and dived from the frail craft without shipping a drop.

He had done it often up in the Maine woods, but never with so much at stake as now. It was a shallow dive, in which he seemed scarcely to slip under the surface before he popped up again close beside the struggling pair. Mad with terror, Hicks had grabbed the tutor about the neck and was doing his best to climb out of the water over the man's body. The best of swimmers

would have found it difficult to keep from going under, and Mr. Topping was struggling vainly when Kingdon rose directly behind the frantic Hicks.

He had gauged his dive accurately. The momentum caused him to shoot up until nearly half his body was exposed. Without hesitation, he caught Pewee under the chin with both hands and jerked his head back with force that brought a gasp of pain from the boy. Hicks, not too far gone to do the instinctive thing, loosed his hold on Topping and clawed at Kingdon's hands. Whereupon Rex promptly shifted his grip to the back of the boy's shirt and swam toward the master's boat, floating near by. He was able to boost Pewee over the stern, and the youngster collapsed in the bottom of the boat, gasping for breath and shaking with fright. Then the rescuer turned about in time to see Mr. Topping's head just slipping beneath the ripples.

In three strokes Rex returned and caught the master by his long hair. The moment the man's head appeared again he gasped and sputtered and grabbed out blindly, but Kingdon managed to evade the clutching hands.

"Stop that!" he cried sharply, forgetting in his

excitement whom he was talking to. "If you don't stop, I'll let you under!"

The master's face worked convulsively. For a moment the boy thought he meant to pay no heed. Then he saw that the other's teeth were set and that the long fingers of the one visible hand were tightly clenched.

"It's all right," the boy assured him, in a different tone. "There's no danger. I can get you to the boat if you'll trust me."

Mr. Topping said nothing, but nodded his head slightly. His black hair streamed limply over the pale forehead, but Kingdon did not find anything ridiculous in the spectacle. In the tutor's eyes was the look of a man fighting back fear by sheer will power, and it commanded the boy's instant respect.

"Just catch hold of my shoulder, Mr. Topping," he directed, "and let me do the rest."

A canoe swept up, paddled by Chip Hatfield.

"Help him get hold of the stern and I'll take him straight to land," advised Chip, turning his craft around deftly. "It won't take long, and it will save his having to climb into the boat."

The nearest shore was not more than forty feet away, though the boathouse was a good deal

farther. With Kingdon's assistance, Mr. Topping took hold of the canoe and was towed to land.

Swimming back to the tutor's boat, Rex found Pewee still weak and shaken. Having climbed in and picked up Ormsby, who had been clinging to the overturned craft, Kingdon rowed for the boathouse, leaving the others to bring in the red canoe and the upset boat.

He managed it all so expeditiously that he was in time to see Mr. Topping emerge from the water and climb stiffly up the shore, a limp, bedraggled, dripping figure. His clothes hung closely to his attenuated body, dribbling little streams of water at every step. His face glistened with moisture. At the top of the slope he paused and absently tried to find the glasses on his nose, which had been torn away when he plunged into the lake. Rex did not crack a smile.

"Good Old Top!" he muttered, under his breath. "He's pure grit, and I had him down for a duffer. Jumped in after Hicks when the best he could do was about a dozen strokes! And when I pulled him up by the hair——"

He gave a sudden gasp, and his eyes opened so wide that the two youngsters, shivering in the

stern, thinking he was watching some new excitement over on the little point, squirmed about to look. He had twined his fingers in the master's hair and drawn him to the surface by that means alone, yet until this moment the amazing incongruity of the thing had failed to strike him.

"Why, it isn't a wig at all—it can't be!" he muttered, keeping the boat headed toward the boathouse. "No wig could possibly stand the strain. I don't understand it. What the mischief did Red mean——"

Perceiving that Mr. Topping was making for the boathouse, Rex bent to the oars and sent his craft skimming through the water. He wanted another look at the tutor's top-piece in disarray. Through his mind flitted wild visions of liquid cement applied to the scalp, or some ingenious adaptation of the vacuum cup by means of which wigs were made to withstand any strain. Landing, he paused only long enough to order Hicks and Ormsby to hustle up to the school. Then he turned to meet the tutor mounting the steps from the beach.

It was an admirable point of vantage. From his superior height Rex looked down on the master's bared head, glistening in the sunlight. He



saw a quantity of lank, dark hair plastered against the high, white forehead and clinging to the somewhat prominent ears. It was worn rather long, and it might, perhaps, have been a trifle thicker; but there was no question in the boy's mind of its being anchored to the owner's head by the usual method of roots.

Reaching the upper level, Mr. Topping paused, blinking in embarrassment at the boys. "I—a—thought——" he murmured. "My hat——"

One of the lads stepped forward and handed it to him. "Here it is, sir. It was in the boat and only got wet a little."

"Ah, thank you!" The master took the odd-shaped black fedora and adjusted it. "The boat," he went on questioningly. "I wonder if I hadn't better——"

"We'll look after it, sir," said Hatfield quickly. "Don't worry about that for a minute. The best thing you can do, sir, is to hurry back to the school and get into some dry things, don't you think?"

"I dare say. Yes, that would be wise. Thank you." His glance met Kingdon's. "Shall we go up together?"

Rex readily agreed, pausing only long enough

to get his coat and cap from the red canoe. There was very little conversation. Once, at a steep part of the climb, Mr. Topping apologized for stopping to get his breath.

"I'm no sort of an athlete," he explained. "I always take this rather slowly."

As they skirted the football field they were eyed with much curiosity by the small boys playing there, but no one summoned the nerve to make any comment. At no time did the master refer to Kingdon having possibly saved his life, or overwhelm him with thanks. Rex liked him the better for his reticence. It was as if he had taken it for granted that the boy would come to his assistance, just as he had apparently taken it for granted when he saw Hicks in peril that there was no other alternative save to jump in after him. At the door of Fiske, however, he held out his hand, and Rex took it. They parted with a commonplace remark or two.

The experience had been a revelation, thought Rex, as he hustled up to his room. Topping was not like the same man at all. He had softened, mellowed; he seemed retiring, almost shy. The boy tried to figure it out, but had as little success as in the puzzle of the wig. As he dressed, his

mind returned to this. When Phillips rushed in about five o'clock with more than his usual impetuosity, Kingdon lost not an instant in pouring out a terse narration of the affair and demanding an explanation.

Red was surprised and skeptical. "That's all bosh! You've got your signals crossed somehow. Didn't the whole blooming school see him bald-headed last spring? Unless he's raised a new crop to cover it—— But that don't cut any figure now. Just listen to some real news. What do you s'pose happened at that meeting in the gym? Can't guess? I didn't expect you could. Well, listen here, then: 'There's a game scheduled for to-morrow—a real, honest-to-goodness game, mind you—between us and the regulars. And the winners are to play Winchester!'"

## CHAPTER XXX.

### CHAMPIONS OF THE SCHOOL.

Rex stared at his friend. "Cracky!" he exclaimed, in astonishment. "Why don't you tell me something exciting? What's happened to Hornbrook? Did Tilly haul him to the office and make up his mind for him?"

Phillips shook his head. "Didn't you know Tilly's away? He went to Boston last night. It's Wash's own proposal."

"Why doesn't he keep his organization, I wonder, and replace the deadwood with material from the scrub?"

"That would be giving in. He vowed he wouldn't do that, and he won't. This way, he stands to win or lose everything. If he wins, he shuts the mouths of the bunch who are clamoring for the scrub to play Winchester. Middy's been campaigning for that, you know, since Saturday. If he loses—well, he'll drop out then for good and all, I suppose."

"It's a sporty proposition," murmured Rex thoughtfully. "Still, I wish he'd think a little more of the school and less of his pride."

"Huh!" grunted Phillips, bristling. "You needn't cast any slurs on our bunch. I guess we can make that Winchester gang of robbers sit up and take notice."

"And then lie right down again, I hope. At the same time, you can't get away from the fact that we haven't been up against an outside team once, and that's what any bunch needs to put it on its mettle. Naturally, we would go after that crowd with all the pep we've got, but I'd feel a whole lot more insouciant—whatever that is—if we could count on Garry and Kester, and maybe have Hornbrook at right end instead of Lardner, who's a lot too light."

That opinion seemed fairly universal throughout the school, though there were a few reckless or impulsive spirits who professed to be thankful that Phillips could wash his hands of Hornbrook's crew. They felt that Wash and his followers had done their best to ruin the football situation and give the school a black eye; it was just as well to put an end to their opportunities for accomplishing further mischief. No one

seemed to doubt for an instant that the scrub would emerge victorious from the coming contest, which would drop the regulars back into oblivion.

"They haven't a show—not a look-in!" emphatically declared Midkiff, as he and Rex started up to their room that evening. "After Saturday, I hope you don't doubt we can play all around them?"

"Not if they give us another sample of that same incompetence. You don't, any of you, seem to consider the possibility of their taking a big brace to-morrow."

Midkiff sniffed. "I never thought you were the sort to get cold feet."

"If you're worrying about any pedal extremities," laughed Rex, "I advise you to consult a nerve specialist. We're going to win to-morrow, but we'll stand less chance of doing it thoroughly if the fellows go into the game with the idea that they've a cinch ahead of them so that it won't be necessary to half try. It's my belief that that crowd will put up a nice little hard fight. They've simply got to, or else be branded before the school as a lot of quitters. I've managed to talk some sense into Red. He'll be up shortly with Gunnison to dope out——"

As they entered the room he broke off, taking a deep breath and staring curiously around. Presently he began to grin. His amused glance returned for a moment to Midkiff's face, and then leaped to Chip Hatfield, who was lolling on the dark green cushions of an excessively new Morris chair placed on Midkiff's side of the center table.

"Very neat, indeed," murmured Kingdon appreciatively. "You've worked it beautifully. Really, Mid—without reflections, of course—I didn't think you had so much seethingly active gray matter under your lid."

In the brief space of two hours a transformation had been wrought in the previously austere portion of the "Great Divide." Pictures, posters and athletic relics had been hung until that side quite equaled Kingdon's in the variety of decorations. The crowning feat, however, had been the clever matching of the mutilated articles. Not only had duplicate posters been secured and the missing halves carefully joined to Kingdon's portion, but the half of a wooden bracket, supporting the rear section of a plaster lion, had been placed so close to the solitary head and shoulders that



the effect was of one perfect whole, the tiny line of juncture barely showing.

"Don't give me credit," returned Midkiff promptly. "I'd never have thought of it in the world. It was Red's idea, and I jumped at it. We had to send for some of the junk. That lion came only this afternoon, and Chip kindly undertook to fix things up while I kept you downstairs. It's a mess"—he looked around with an expression that was not nearly as disapproving as he meant it to be—"but I couldn't stand that lopsided effect any longer."

Kingdon glanced around again with unqualified approval. "It's not a mess at all," he drawled, dropping into his own easy-chair. "It's just the sort of room I've always had in mind." His smile widened. "It doesn't seem to have occurred to you, John, that there's more than one way to cure a sick cat."

For a second Midkiff stared uncomprehendingly. Then a vivid flush stained his face. "Oh, come now!" he protested. "You don't mean you had that in mind?"

Rex chuckled. "Knowing your fondness for the orderly and the precise, it occurred to me as a possibility."

Hatfield roared delightedly. "You're stung, Middy, old man!"

"Not at all," protested Rex, his eyes twinkling. "You see, it's much more comfortable and cozy to have pleasant things around to look at and sit on, instead of bare walls and solid ivory——"

A sofa cushion, flying from the hand of the badgered Midkiff, ended the discussion.

Soon afterward, Phillips and Gunnison appearing, Chip was banished, and the four members of the scrub settled down in earnest to go over various plays for use on the morrow.

The novel contest drew a record crowd to the athletic field next afternoon. Every boy was there, even to the bookish lads who spent their spare time in the library and took their exercise in the gym classes. And each one of those boys was fiercely partisan. Even if he cared little or nothing about the make-up of the team that was to uphold the honor of the school against Winchester, it appeared that he was very much for or against the Clan. The majority, it must be confessed, were against.

Hornbrook seemed to have entirely recovered his normal spirits and poise. He was his old careless, nonchalant, handsome self, keen, alert,

and smiling, as if a doubt of victory had never troubled him. Rex wondered whether it was a pose or if he really expected to win. In either case, his manner had done much to infect the remainder of the team with courage and determination. They had cast aside the hang-dog air that had characterized a number of them since the game last Saturday, and carried themselves with much of their old cockiness.

The Second won the toss and chose the ball. The day was so calm that there was no special advantage in either goal. The very first clash with the regulars showed them that there had been a decided change from the apathy and disorganization of Saturday. Somehow, Wash had imbued his followers with a little of his spirit. They were ready to put up a stiff fight.

During the first and second quarters the contesting players surged up and down the field, without, at any time, passing much beyond the thirty-yard line on either side. It was a contest of small gains and frequent kicking; of hard, strenuous football of the non-spectacular order. Once Rex made a fine forward pass to Phillips, who dug his toes into the turf and tore down the field. Unfortunately, he could not quite evade

Beauty Kester, who had the reputation of being sure death to any runner. The teams had scarcely lined up after that down before the whistle sounded for intermission. With half the game over and no score secured, it began to look like a draw.

The spectators were aroused to great excitement and suspense. The adherents of the scrub were much downcast at the possibility of their heroes being defeated, and the demeanor of the regulars, when they appeared after the long rest, was not at all encouraging. They started in with a rush and swing, speedily taking the ball from their opponents and pushing it down the field. For a little more than five minutes they were irresistible. Then, almost in the twinkling of an eye, they cracked. Hornbrook was as keyed up and vigorous as ever, while Kester and Lane and two or three other players still put their shoulders willingly and eagerly to the wheel. But the others had fizzled out exactly like damp gunpowder. They simply weren't players of the proper caliber for the eleven. They were fundamentally lacking in some vital quality of strength or nerve or courage. They could not endure being driven to the very last notch.

For the remainder of the game the splendid grit of Hornbrook and his few good men did not flag; though they must have realized it was a lost cause they fought on. Again and again they checked the scrub in the very shadow of the goal posts. In the last fifteen minutes, however, Phillips and his men would not be denied. They scored two goals, and kicked them both. The game ended with the regulars decisively beaten. And the defenders of the school against Winchester had been chosen.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### ONE TOUCH OF NATURE.

Amidst the shouts and cheering and general jubilation that accompanied the players up the hill, Rex all at once discovered Mr. Topping only a few feet away. The tutor was smiling vaguely and looking about in the absent, almost bewildered manner he had at times. Catching his eye, the boy smiled and nodded with a cordiality that brought a faint touch of pink to the man's rather sallow face.

"How are you, sir?" Rex asked quickly. "Hope you didn't suffer any bad effect from that wetting yesterday?"

"No, I think not, thank you," returned the master. "I took some quinine to ward off a cold." After a slight pause he went on in his oddly precise manner: "I need scarcely ask the same of you. I believe—that is, they say you played a most creditable game."

"I'm afraid they are too flattering, sir," returned Rex. "I did very little."

"It looked—er—dashing," remarked the tutor slowly. "I wonder if you could find time some day to explain the game to me?"

"The game? Football? Why, of course! I'll be very glad to tell you anything I know, sir."

"I've never played," explained Mr. Topping apologetically. "Until I came to Walcott Hall, in fact, I had never seen a game. Perhaps you wouldn't mind coming over to my study after supper to-night?"

Stifling his surprise, Kingdon readily agreed, and hurried on to the gym. He could not imagine why the tutor had suddenly become so interested in football. When supper was over, he gave Mr. Topping just long enough to reach his rooms in Fisk Hall. Rex was greeted pleasantly when he arrived at the study, but with a touch almost of shyness. After he had taken a seat at one side of the study table, there was a rather prolonged pause.

"I've asked no one about it before," said Mr. Topping, at last. "I wanted to see if I couldn't make it out by myself, but I'm afraid it's too complicated." He smiled faintly. "That's rather a



sad confession for a teacher of mathematics, isn't it? The trouble is that I don't seem to have a brain for sports and games. If you could tell me about it, just simply and easily——"

"I'll try," said Kingdon quickly. "There's nothing really hard about it after you get the rules in your head."

Enthusiastically the boy plunged into a description of his favorite sport, pausing now and then to make sure he was getting a detail straight and putting it in the simplest possible language. Mr. Topping listened intently. Presently he began to ask questions which showed that he was beginning to grasp the idea. When Rex had finished, the master nodded.

"That seems clear. With the aid of a book of rules, I believe I shall find it interesting as well as——" He checked himself, flushing a little. Perceiving that the boy was watching him curiously, he went on with a touch of gentle defiance: "Does taking an interest in the sports help make a master better liked, Kingdon?"

Rex's eyes widened. "Better liked, sir? I don't see how it—— No, sir; I shouldn't say that alone would make much difference."

Mr. Topping's face fell. "But I thought—— There's Mr. Penruddock; isn't he——"

"Popular? Oh, yes, very! But it isn't because he's out on the field every afternoon."

"Why, then?"

Rex hesitated an instant, his forehead puckered. The conversation was taking an astonishing turn.

"I think it must be because he's just himself," he said at length, putting his idea into words rather lamely.

"Ah! You mean simplicity—his natural self, without airs or presumption?"

"That's it. He's always the same. He treats a chap just as he'd treat one of his men friends. A fellow don't like to be patronized and talked down to, and all that sort of thing. Besides, he likes to—— Why, you know what I mean, sir. There was what you did down at the lake the other day, and the way you did it. Everybody thinks heaps more of you since then, all right."

Mr. Topping stared. "Why, that wasn't intended—— That was a foolish, impulsive sort of thing. I'd have done much more good by staying in the boat and reaching out a hand or an oar. But the boy was drowning, and I leaped after him

without stopping to think that I was almost as helpless in the water myself."

"Just the same," said Kingdon, with conviction, "it was a fine thing to do. It showed the stuff you were made of. You'll find that about every fellow in school will think a lot more of you for that one impulsive action than if you came out and watched the football games from now till—— Great Scott! I beg your pardon, sir. I didn't mean to—— I sort of forgot whom I was talking to, I guess."

Mr. Topping smiled. "Don't apologize, Kingdon. You've told me just what I wanted to know." For a moment he seemed to meditate before lifting his eyes to look again at his guest and speaking in a tone of whimsical regret. "I may as well tell you the rest, I think. You'll see that masters have to be taught sometimes, as well as boys. The trouble was, I started wrong. I was a private tutor until two years ago. I've always liked boys, but I never had a number of them to manage until I got this position. I was a bit doubtful what sort of attitude I ought to take. Finally I went to an older friend, who is a very successful educator, and put the question to him. He advised great firmness, lest the boys

override me and take the bit in their teeth in the beginning. He also said that a tutor should be always on the alert for wrongdoing, always suspicious of cheating and lying. I'm afraid he—er—must have been singularly unfortunate in his pupils. I've found very little of that here."

"It isn't exactly the type of fellow who comes to Walcott," Rex murmured.

"Quite the reverse. But I had started off when I found out, and it was difficult to change my methods. I was handicapped last year, too. An illness made it advisable to—er—shave my head, and I was foolish enough to wear a wig while my hair was coming in again. 'That was the cause of considerable unpleasantness.' He flushed a little. "All the same, I should not have taken my friend's advice. I should have had more initiative and judged for myself. 'That's what I started out to do this fall, but I've been afraid to change too radically, lest the boys should imagine I was seeking to gain favor. It wouldn't do for them to think me weakening, but I wanted them to like me a little—if that is possible.'"

He ceased, his expression so curiously wistful that Rex burst out impulsively:

"I shouldn't worry about that, Mr. Topping.

A bunch of the fellows think a lot of you already, and it wouldn't surprise me if you soon pushed Mr. Penruddock a close second."

The master positively beamed. "Do you think so?" he asked eagerly. "Really think so? It seemed as if I might reasonably hope, then—— Bless me! I really had no notion it was so late. You must go at once, or you'll be marked out of bounds. You have helped me very much, Kingdon, and I thank you. It has been an odd talk—— really a most extraordinary one, quite without precedent. But I am more than glad I summoned courage to take the step. Your frankness has been exactly what I wanted, and what I was afraid I might not get. Good night, and thank you for giving me your time."

With an equally cordial good night, Rex picked up his cap and turned toward the door. His hand was on the knob when he paused, and glanced around.

"I hope what I've said isn't going to drive you away from the field, sir," he said, with a gravity that was belied by his twinkling eyes. "I've half a notion you've been a mascot for us in this rivalry with the First."

Mr. Topping shook his head. "I'm a creature

of habit," he declared, with a faint smile. "Besides, after your very lucid explanation, I don't see why I shouldn't begin really to enjoy the practice. Do you?"

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### THE NEW BEGINNING.

Until next morning, it did not occur to Rex that practice was likely to be a matter of some difficulty. With Phillips at the head of things and the autocratic, intolerant Hornbrook in a subordinate place, trouble seemed inevitable.

Curiously enough, Wash did not cause as much trouble as some others on the team. Hornbrook appeared on the field dressed for play. His manner was light, airy and casual, as if he were prepared for a frolicsome afternoon; but he was there, which was more than could be said of fully half the former regulars. Phillips was angry, and, at first, was for hunting up the delinquents and forcing them to do their duty. Then he decided to let them go.

"They're not worth troubling about," he commented. "We've got better men among our own subs."



When consulted, Hornbrook waved the whole matter airily away. "Just as you say, Red. It's all up to you, old man. You're the doctor now. It's not half bad fun shifting the responsibility. Great freedom from care, you know, and all that. I've an idea I'll enjoy watching the game Saturday."

Phillips frowned. "I was counting on you to play, Wash," he said, after a momentary hesitation.

"Don't. Haven't I told you I'm out of it?"

"But if we need you?"

"You won't, if you know you can't have me. All that was settled yesterday. I'll come out for practice because I've got to take exercise some way, but on the day of the game I'm free."

That was his stand, and he maintained it all throughout that strenuous week. Lane readily accepted a position on the team, and at the eleventh hour Kester was won over. But Hornbrook remained adamant, in spite of the disquieting rumors which reached the school of the extraordinary prowess of the Winchester eleven, especially the brilliancy and speed of their ends.

When the great day finally arrived, bringing the famous rival team, it was seen that for once

rumor had not greatly exaggerated. They made as fine a bunch of football material as had ever appeared at Walcott Hall. They had weight and confidence. The preliminary practice on the grid-iron also showed that they possessed speed and an ominous facility at kicking.

Nevertheless, the school remained loyal. Cheer after cheer, full of inspiring confidence, rose from the crowd. Songs—the old school songs which had been sung for generations—were started with a swing and carried through to their rhythmic rushing conclusions. It was a day when every noncombatant did his part. If he held a single doubt of ultimate victory for Walcott, he did not show it.

Among them, yet giving an odd, subtle impression of being aloof, was Wash Hornbrook, well groomed and handsome in the Norfolk suit that fitted his trim figure perfectly. He laughed and joked with seeming careless ease of mind. Apparently he was oblivious to the hostile glances cast now and then in his direction, or to the indignant whispers that occasionally reached his ears. That very morning he had reiterated his refusal to play in the game, and many of the boys did not

refrain from showing their disapproval at his attitude.

Walcott won the toss, and, there being a rather brisk wind blowing, chose the protected goal, giving the enemy the ball. The players swiftly took their places for the kick off. Presently the whistle sounded. Immediately the thud of feet pounding the turf set Hornbrook's nerves tingling, and his careless slouch vanished in a sudden stiffness. His jaw tightened; a look of keen attention flashed into his face.

Winchester demonstrated its strength in short order. Watching the progress of the ball toward Walcott's goal, Wash realized that the visitors had been well drilled. Every now and then they made use of some novel play that showed the presence of an alert and ingenious mind behind their splendid work.

Nevertheless, the home team fought well, and even the watching Hornbrook had to admit a grudging admiration for the masterly manner in which the blond quarterback handled them. With uncanny cleverness and judgment, Kingdon swung his forces where they were least expected, caught the enemy unprepared, felt out their weaknesses, minimized their strength. In defense,

too, he made frequent use of a marvelous intuition in seeming to divine the enemy's plays. His shouted warnings were never wrong.

In the first quarter the honors were pretty equally divided. When it ended, Hornbrook gave a little sigh of relief. He had told himself, early in the day, that he hoped to see Phillips and Kingdon overwhelmed by superior force and cleverness. Now he knew that he had been deceiving himself. During those tense fifteen minutes he had been heart and soul for Walcott Hall, no matter who was on the team; he had thrilled at each advantage, been downcast over each setback.

Now, moving restlessly up and down the sideline, his brain was busy scheming, planning, contriving for the home team, exactly as if he were out there with the players and directing things, as he had in every game for the past two years. When the teams formed again, after the first quarter, a sharp, stabbing pain went through the fellow who had been left behind.

Why had he been so stubborn? Why had he turned down Phillips' request? Pride had suddenly seemed to him a wretched thing when weighed in the balance with loyalty. He ought to be out there fighting with the others for Walcott

Hall and victory. He was a coward, a quitter, a traitor! Why hadn't he thought of that before? He had come to his senses when it was too late!

With a groan of dismay, he presently saw Garry Lane hauled out of a scrimmage and carried from the field. A substitute went in—one not in the same class with the fellow he replaced. That the change had weakened the whole team was soon apparent. Winchester saw it, and her quarter centered the attack on that weak point. Time after time he flung his men at that hole in the line, and each time they went through for a gain. The sub was withdrawn, and another took his place.

But the situation did not improve. The solid phalanx of the opposing team made its way slowly but inexorably down the field. There were occasional rallies, to be sure, but somehow the black and purple made the required gains. At last, with a sob in his throat, his nails digging into his palms, Hornbrook saw the pigskin forced over the line and heard the Winchester adherents cheering wildly.

The goal was kicked, and before that quarter was over, Winchester scored again on a drop kick, getting a lead of nine points.

Hornbrook did not leave his place on the grass. Through all the long intermission he squatted there, viciously jabbing his penknife into the ground, heedless of those about him, his brows drawn into a scowl, his somber eyes full of a strange mixture of longing and pain.

The third quarter started with a fresh swing. The rest had done the home team good, and evidently there had been some straight talk that had heartened the players and brought them to a realizing sense of the gravity of their position.

The ball was forced down to Winchester's thirty-yard line. Hornbrook realized whose brain was dominating the work. Kingdon seemed to be everywhere at once, slippery as an eel, dodging hither and thither in a bewildering fashion. He worked forward passes and trick plays, always making gains, ever advancing.

Presently, watching this exhibition, Hornbrook's cheeks began to burn and his eyes to sparkle. Would Kingdon make it? Could he possibly keep it up and force the ball across the line?

The quarter ripped out a rapid signal. The ball was snapped back, and there followed a bewildering, lightning-like intricate pass. It was a play Phillips and Midkiff had worked out—a play

at which Hornbrook had sneered. Like a thing endowed with life, the pigskin leaped from one player to the other. For a moment Wash lost sight of it entirely. Then he caught his breath as Kingdon sprang out of the *mêlée*, the oval tucked under his arm, and raced over the sod as if he were as fresh as when he first set foot on the field.

Winchester was taken by surprise. The visitors had apparently been prepared for quite another sort of play, and there was a comparatively free field open for Rex. Only two men were between him and the coveted goal. He could outdistance the first, who was a little to one side, but the fullback would have to be reckoned with.

Hornbrook, on his feet and watching in breathless suspense, saw the runner come on without slackening his speed; saw him swerve suddenly to one side, whirl, dart past. This was done in such a brief moment that the opposing fullback did not come to his senses till the lad with the ball was a dozen feet away, still dashing for the goal.

Hornbrook did not join in the roar of delight that went up. Perspiration beaded his forehead as he watched the runner anxiously. Kingdon was not making his usual speed. He limped



slightly, and the fullback seemed to be gaining. Slowly but surely the latter crept up. Rex ran with increasing effort. His face showed white through the grime; his under lip was flecked with crimson.

In the sudden, tense silence that fell upon the crowd of anxious-eyed spectators, Hornbrook was aware of an oddly familiar voice beside him.

"You must make it! You must make it!" the voice whispered tensely. "Don't let him catch you up!"

Wash was amazed. Mr. Topping stood there, his hands clasped, his hat awry. A round spot of color glowed on each lean cheek. His blue eyes glittered. "Don't let him catch you up!" he repeated; and then: "Oh, dear! He *has* caught him up!"

With a jerk, Wash turned to the gridiron again. Just inside the last five-yard line, the fullback had overtaken Kingdon, securing a grip about the runner's waist.

"He can't make it!" groaned Hornbrook. "It isn't possible!"

Somehow Rex accomplished the impossible. Struggling, dragging, straining every nerve, he

pulled the bigger fellow with him, crossed the intervening space, flung himself over the line.

Of course the crowd went wild with joy. Then came apprehensive speculation as to whether Kingdon would be out of the game. Evidently, however, the plucky quarter had no intention of ornamenting the sideline if he could help it. Wash could hear him protesting with Mr. Penruddock:

"It's only a little strain. I slipped in dodging. It's nothing to keep me out of the game."

Before anything more could be accomplished the quarter terminated.

Two minutes after the final period began, I Phillips was hauled out of a *mêlée* with a broken collarbone!

The calamity was so sudden, so unexpected, so appalling, that a groan went through the crowd. With Lane out and Kingdon lamed, this catastrophe to the team captain was like a death blow to their hopes. Midkiff remained, a tower of strength and dogged determination; but he was only one of three. Save Gunnison and Kester, the others of the team were not of the stuff to bear a forlorn hope.

All this passed swiftly through the tortured

brain of Wash Hornbrook as he stood staring at the pain-lined face of the injured man, for the accident had taken place close to that side of the field. Then he raised his eyes to meet Rex Kingdon's steady stare, and something went through him like an electric shock. Not a word passed the quarter's lips, yet as clearly as a phonographic disk receives its imprint, Hornbrook's brain recorded a pleading, insistent request.

For a single second he remained unmoved. Then, with an odd sound in his throat, he whirled and rushed to the spot where a few remaining substitutes were gathered.

"Manny!" he snapped, gripping one of them by the shoulder. "Come with me—quick!"

Bewildered, the other obeyed instinctively, and the two ran swiftly to the little room beneath the stand. Here the sub, still dazed but dominated by Hornbrook's blazing personality, hurriedly stripped off his football togs, which Wash as quickly donned. In three minutes he was back on the field.

At the sight of him in football rig, a murmur of surprise arose, followed by a burst of cheering. Wash paid no heed. He was not doing anything now for praise or glory, but for the school. Even

as he reported to Mr. Penruddock, Kingdon saw him. Instantly Rex, now in full command, sent a groggy player from the field, and Hornbrook dashed out to fill the vacancy. Grimly the quarterback greeted the newcomer and sent him to right end.

At the unexpected appearance of the crack player and former captain, the team seemed to rally. Desperately the battered lads threw themselves at the enemy, as if determined that nothing should stop them from another score. Hornbrook was promptly in the van, performing prodigies, seeking desperately to repair the damage his selfishness had done. Winchester was bent on holding the lead, and, with slow gains and many downs, the minutes slipped by with perilous swiftness.

Kingdon tried play after play, and then all at once it seemed as if he had made up his mind to risk everything in a single throw. There was the play—a complicated combination of criss-crossing and double passes—which Hornbrook had ridiculed the day before. He did not sneer at it now. As he heard the signal he caught his breath, and every muscle tensed in thrilling anticipation. Kingdon was giving him his chance!

The ball was snapped. There was a rush to one side as it flew to the left half. Promptly it was returned to the quarter and tucked under the latter's arm. The whole Winchester line surged forward. Hornbrook plunged in as if he were intent only on interfering in Kingdon's behalf. But he had a different duty to perform. Before their opponents realized what was being done, Kingdon was blocking and being battered down, while Hornbrook, the pigskin clutched tightly, shot through and out upon the field, leaving a piled-up mass of human beings many yards behind.

Joy was the supreme sensation in Hornbrook's breast. Only the opposing fullback threatened. Behind him came the sounds of pursuit, but he was not afraid of being overtaken from the rear. Deceived by the play, the fullback had gone farther up the field for a kick. Now he came charging at full speed.

Hornbrook's mind was alert and ready. He seemed to falter. The fullback prepared to tackle. He bent far over to make it at full speed and slam the breath out of the runner. Wash was almost within his reach when he dove forward.

There was a gasp from the spectators, a hush,

then a thunderous yell of joy. For Hornbrook had leaped high in the air, cleared the hooking arms, stumbled, got his balance again, and was running on, the ball still cupped in the curve of his arm.

The touchdown was made. The goal was kicked to the accompaniment of delirious joy on the part of the excited spectators. After the scant remaining minutes had been played out, the madly rejoicing throng rushed the players and endeavored to hoist some of them up on their shoulders. Hornbrook would have none of it. He actually fought his way to where Rex Kingdon was standing.

Their eyes met, and Rex smiled. That smile seemed to bridge the chasm between them, even though through the mind of the former autocrat of Walcott Hall flashed the thought that his rival was destined to rise to the throne from which Wash had been thrust by his own intolerance and folly. Whether or not he was right in such a belief may be learned by reading the fourth volume of *THE TWENTIETH CENTURY BOYS' SERIES*, entitled "Rex Kingdon Behind the Bat."

"You're mighty white, Kingdon," Hornbrook

said, his voice shaking. "What do you say if we start fresh?"

"I don't think that's necessary," returned Rex. "Seems to me we've made a good start already." Then the crowd caught them both up.

THE END.







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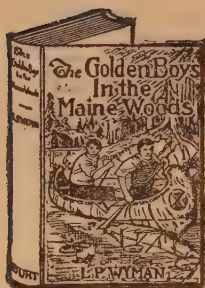
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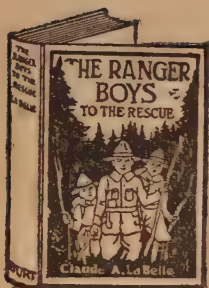
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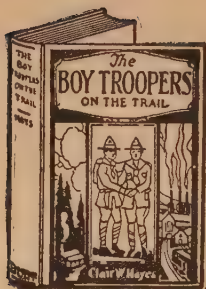
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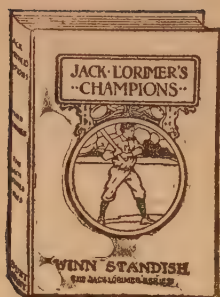
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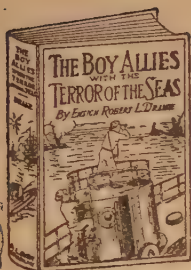
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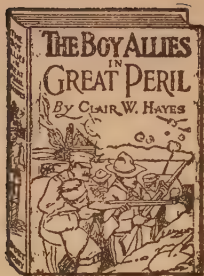
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